



## Connecting diversity

### Paradoxes of multicultural Australia

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# Connecting Diversity: Paradoxes of Multicultural Australia

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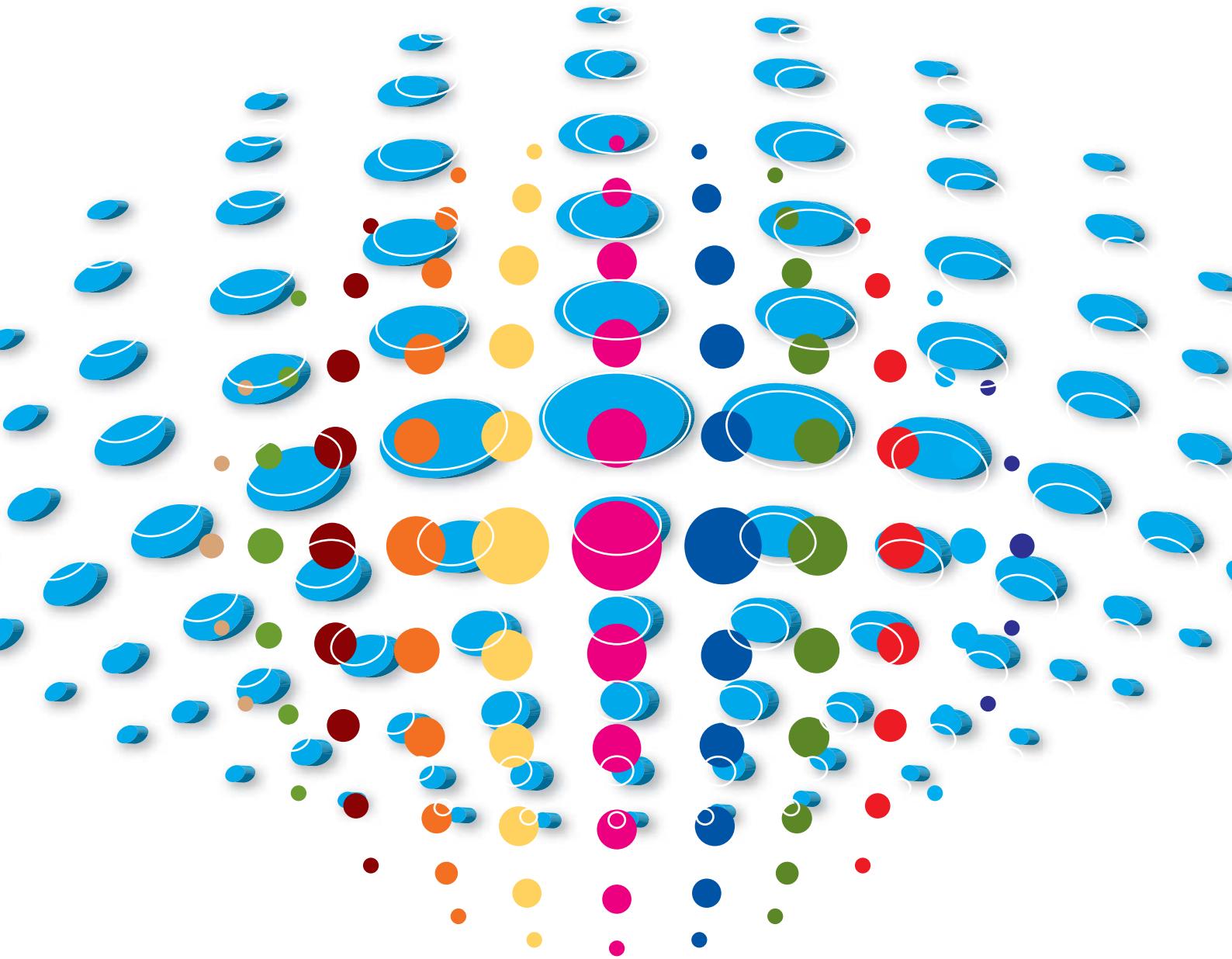
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# CONNECTING DIVERSITY

PARADOXES OF MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA



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(Author: **Multicultural Australia Today**)

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(Author: **Younger People as Citizen Audiences and Appendix 1**)

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(Author: **Ways of Belonging to Australia**)

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(Author: **News and Current Affairs: Cynicism and Values**)

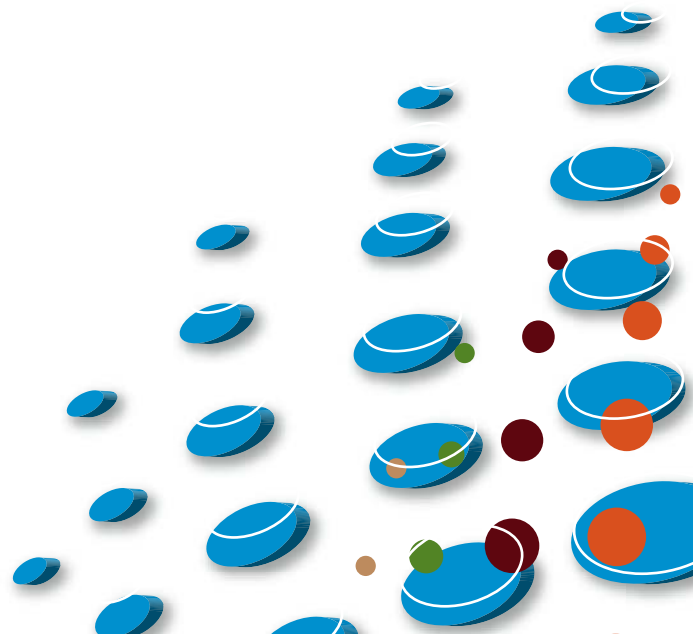
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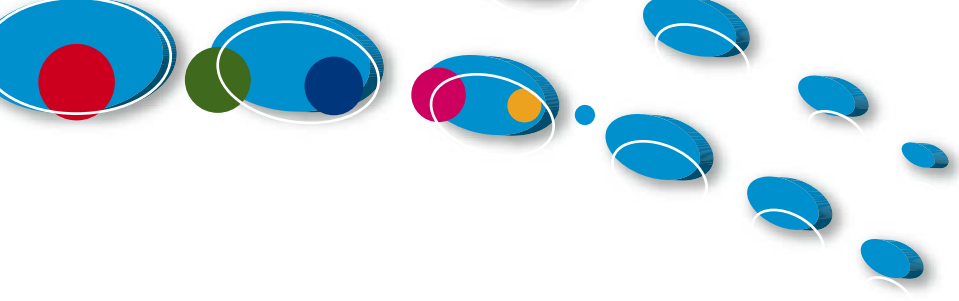
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# CONNECTING DIVERSITY

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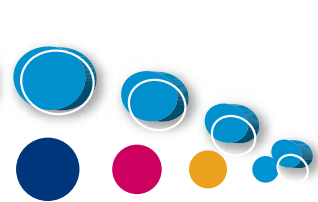
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Dr Jason Sternberg**





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## Foreword

This is a particularly timely report. The focus groups for this study were conducted only weeks before racial tension erupted on the streets of Sydney and sections of the media fanned public unease about cultural and religious differences. The debate was polarised: one was either for or against multiculturalism. But this research reveals a much more complex picture of social experience and attitudes to cultural diversity in Australia, including the role of media, than what was exposed in the ensuing heated public debate.

In the context of opinion page commentary, talkback radio and political point-scoring around the value or perceived failure of multiculturalism, it is important to 'take the temperature' of the attitudes to diversity in Australia and to explore the ways people experience and respond to diversity in their everyday lives. SBS has always maintained a commitment to understand and reflect Australia's cultural diversity, and in recent years this has expanded into major research projects.

In 2002, the SBS-commissioned report *Living Diversity: Australia's Multicultural Future* was published. This report:

- filled a gap in existing research;
- explored issues of identity, and attitudes to multiculturalism and media; and
- assisted SBS to fulfil its multilingual and multicultural Charter.

*Living Diversity* used a unique methodology and was based on collaboration between SBS and independent researchers. This second phase of research, commissioned in 2005, meets a key objective of the SBS Corporate Plan to "increase our understanding of Australia's cultural diversity, our audiences and the role of SBS".

*Connecting Diversity: Paradoxes of Multicultural Australia* focuses on younger audiences and the way their engagement with media and other cultural influences shapes their sense of belonging. Today's younger audiences are using media differently from previous generations and second- and third-generation Australians are engaging with multiculturalism in new ways.

We believe the findings in this report will challenge many of the commonly held assumptions and stereotypes about cultural diversity and young people. They also reveal challenges and opportunities for organisations committed to reflecting diversity in Australia.

**Shaun Brown**  
Managing Director  
Special Broadcasting Service



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The attitudes of many younger Australians from culturally diverse backgrounds reveal paradoxes about Australian multiculturalism today. This report, *Connecting Diversity: Paradoxes of Multicultural Australia*, sheds light on their views, experiences and expectations and the role of media in their lives.

Younger, culturally and linguistically diverse Australians are often the subject of media-fanned controversy about disaffection, 'ethnic gangs' and cultural isolation. While these controversies tend to be localised – Cronulla, Inala or Bankstown – *Connecting Diversity* tells a national and quite different story.

This research builds upon the findings of the 2002 report commissioned by SBS, *Living Diversity: Australia's Multicultural Future*, which challenged common assumptions about contemporary multicultural Australia. In an era of fragmenting media and assumed political apathy, *Connecting Diversity* further examines many of the findings of the earlier study, with a new focus on younger people, cultural identity and media use.

*Connecting Diversity* reveals individual experiences and often contradictory ideas about media and diversity in Australia. Disjunctions appear to exist between an individual's experience and their thoughts about Australia's national identity.

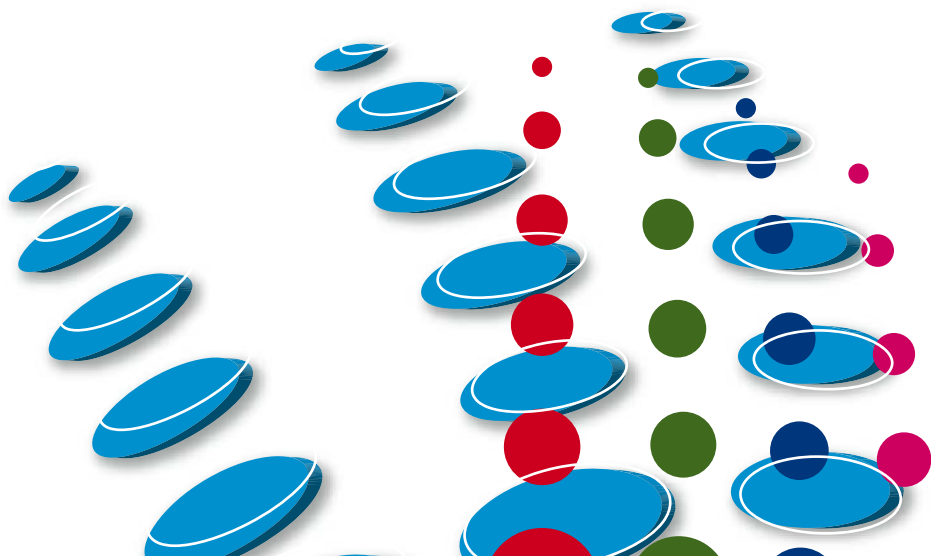
Multiculturalism is valued for broadening the appreciation of difference, yet this support can coexist with concerns about perceived segregation, usually 'elsewhere' in Australia.

Younger people tend to be more comfortable with cultural difference than previous generations and cite their own diverse network of friends as one of the reasons for this. Even so, some describe experiences of racism that engender a feeling of exclusion from 'mainstream' society. In their everyday lives, social relationships are navigated through regular and familiar connections on the one hand, and experiences and expressions of disconnection on the other. Racism and tolerance may be expressed almost simultaneously. These disconnections are often managed through 'practical tolerance', allowing them to negotiate these apparent contradictions. The connections can be based simultaneously on such things as work, family, religion, friendships or location. The result is a multilayered sense of personal belonging and community connection.

A large number of respondents in these focus groups expressed frustration at the failings of media, especially news and current affairs coverage, yet spoke enthusiastically about the accessibility and range of media compared to what was available to previous generations. In their many forms, media remain a key

ingredient of self-identification among younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds who are especially cynical about media and disillusioned by their perceived inability to influence issues that are important to them. These findings reveal that although they may be cynical about media messages, these younger Australians are looking for connection through media and are seeking ways to participate in meaningful ways. This raises questions about the possibilities for media to empower younger people to play a part in genuine cultural democracy.

By capturing the attitudes of Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds under the age of 40, *Connecting Diversity: Paradoxes of Multicultural Australia* provides an insight into social trends and the generational and cultural changes that are now shaping Australia.



# FINDINGS

## MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA TODAY

### 1. Australia is still perceived as the 'lucky country'.

This is especially true for younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds in comparison to their (or their families') countries of origin.

**however...** There is concern about Australia's future and people feel a lack of control.

Participants in this study were fearful about the future when they thought about world issues as reported in media. They are acutely aware that Australia's future is bound up with the realities of globalisation.

### 2. Multiculturalism is valued because it allows people to learn from each other.

There is overwhelming appreciation of Australia's cultural diversity because it broadens horizons and enhances mutual understanding.

**however...** Many have concerns about segregation and talk about the need for groups to integrate.

Some participants expressed a lack of sympathy for groups that "stick together" and believe that differences should be balanced with interaction and participation in the "Australian way of life". There is, however, no evidence of 'ethnic ghettos' in Australia.

### 3. Many younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds still feel an incomplete acceptance by mainstream society.

Many of these Australians have experienced or observed instances of prejudice, discrimination and intolerance first hand.

**however...** Interactive cultural diversity is becoming increasingly mainstream.

Younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds are more comfortable interacting with others of different cultural backgrounds and feel that multiculturalism in Australia has progressed a lot in the past 30 years.

## WAYS OF BELONGING TO AUSTRALIA

### 4. There are many different ways of belonging in and to Australia.

Younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds may have 'multiple belongings'. They may form an identity out of their cultural background, age group, religion, location, friendships and work at the same time. These connections allow for different ways of participating in Australian public life.

**however...** These belongings may also cause confusion or division.

There is a concern that competing forms of attachment could be disorientating, both for those with a migrant background and for 'mainstream' society.

**5. Forms of exclusion and discrimination undermine senses of belonging.**

Many younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds continue to encounter ignorance and prejudice in their lives. Even though they identify as being at home in Australia, these experiences shape the extent to which they 'feel' Australian.

**however...** Cultural differences are generally managed with 'practical tolerance'.

Despite experiences of exclusion, younger people address problems of cultural difference through engaged interaction. This 'practical tolerance' is a pragmatic approach which negotiates the prejudices of everyday life and fosters the benefits of diversity.

**YOUNGER PEOPLE AS CITIZEN AUDIENCES**

**6. Younger Australians have a strong sense of connection with particular media.**

They use a wider variety of communication technologies than previous generations, but tend to prefer electronic and interpersonal communication devices, often simultaneously. By comparison, older groups have retained more selective, traditional media habits and segregate the use of media, preferring to use one tool at a time and for a dedicated, single purpose.

**however...** There is often distrust and disconnection associated with media content.

Mainstream media content is viewed critically. This is articulated in terms of cynicism about news and current affairs coverage or critical distancing from entertainment content. This was often expressed in terms of concern about the assumed impact of this content on others.

**7. Younger Australians believe they are more capable of filtering information than previous generations.**

Younger citizen audiences generally felt that they had many more options and a greater access to information than previous generations. This was generally viewed positively, although it required more 'filtering' of information.

**however...** They feel media do not empower them to 'make change' on important issues.

Much mainstream media is seen as 'disabling', as it is distrusted and represents only a few voices with assumed particular agendas. Many felt 'bombarded' by media messages and felt they could do little about the issues raised.

**NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS: CYNICISM AND VALUES**

**8. Audiences are highly critical of news and current affairs.**

Younger audiences are highly critical of the way news and current affairs covers issues and feel frustrated because mainstream news media do not provide information that enables them to engage with the world as citizens.

**however...** They still value the role news and current affairs are supposed to play.

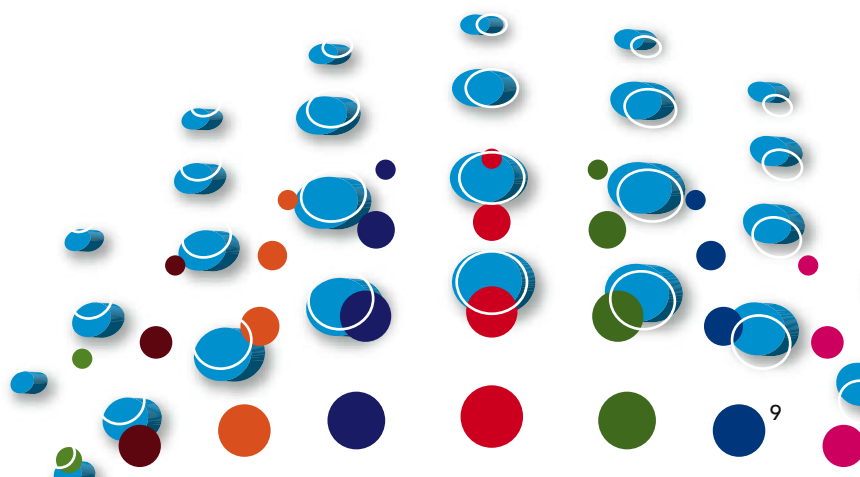
Negative attitudes towards news and current affairs are produced by a perception of the genre's failure to live up to the journalistic ideals of objectivity, credibility, relevance and impartiality.

**9. 'Depressing' one-way traditional media produces cynicism among younger audiences.**

Younger Australians are not inherently cynical and apathetic towards social and political issues. Rather, their strong sense of disengagement from news and current affairs is their way of dealing with the overwhelming feelings of negativity which the news media produces.

**however...** They engage with world issues through a variety of sources.

Because younger Australians see themselves as media literate, they are comfortable drawing on a range of information sources and critically assessing these in order to make sense of important issues. Discussing news events with others is not only an important way of getting new information, but also plays a vital role in connecting audiences as a community.



## Focus Groups Overview

This study comprised 18 focus groups (1.5 hours in duration) of up to 10 participants, with a total sample of 137 respondents. The groups were conducted between 10-28 October, 2005.

The focus groups consisted of participants from the following age bands:

- 16-20 years old
- 26-30 years old
- 36-40 years old

Participants were recruited from a range of cultural backgrounds. Recruitment was based on various factors, including 'language/s spoken at home' and ancestry identification. The recruitment specification also sought participants from a range of generations in

Australia, so that they represented a mix of first-, second-, and third-generation Australians. There was an approximate gender balance among participants. The groups were sourced from specific geographical areas. For more information about the locations and the conduct of the focus groups, see the methodology section of this report (Appendix 2).

The focus groups sessions are referred to in the text of this report according to the codes listed in the table below. For example, S6 refers to the 26-30 year-old group recruited from the Liverpool area in Sydney (NSW), and B4 is the 36-40 year-old group recruited from the Stretton-Karawatha area in Brisbane (QLD).

Group	Location	Age Band	Participants
Sydney (NSW)			
S1	Chatswood/Willoughby	26-30	9
S2	Chatswood/Willoughby	36-40	9
S3	Strathfield/Burwood/Ashfield	16-20	9
S4	Strathfield/Burwood/Ashfield	36-40	9
S5	Liverpool	16-20	5
S6	Liverpool	26-30	8
Brisbane (QLD)			
B1	Inala/Richlands	16-20	5
B2	Inala/Richlands	26-30	6
B3	Stretton-Karawatha	26-30	6
B4	Stretton-Karawatha	36-40	9
B5	Mt Ommaney	16-20	8
B6	Mt Ommaney	36-40	6
Western Australia			
W1	Bunbury	16-20	9
W2	Bunbury	26-30	7
W3	Carnarvon	26-30	7
W4	Carnarvon	36-40	7
W5	Broome	16-20	9
W6	Broome	36-40	9
Total			137

# MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA TODAY

## Introduction

Australia today is a diverse and fluid society. In our previous report, *Living Diversity*, we concluded that cultural diversity is a fact of life in Australia and that most Australians, of whatever background, are increasingly at ease with it. That study also found that younger people were more positive about immigration, multiculturalism and cultural diversity than older people. The findings indicated that multiculturalism is becoming mainstream in contemporary Australia. At the same time, however, we also found that about one-third of the national sample was ambivalent about cultural diversity, considering it neither a strength nor a weakness of Australian society.

In this section, we draw on focus groups to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the complexities of multicultural Australia today. How do these younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds view today's Australia? What are their attitudes and perceptions about multiculturalism and cultural diversity? We found that there is both strong support for and some reservation about multiculturalism: it is endorsed because it teaches us more about other cultures, but it is perceived as also creating division and conflict. Overall, multicultural Australia today is a paradoxical place, with the focus groups both apprehensive and hopeful about its future.

## one. Australia is still perceived as the 'lucky country'.

In 1964, Donald Horne published his now classic book *The Lucky Country*. He used the term ironically, suggesting that Australia's good fortune – its prosperity and happiness – was based on luck rather than on achievement and hard work. Over the years, however, the phrase has been embraced by Australians as positive, a term of endearment. The focus group discussions revealed that younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds continue to think of Australia as a 'lucky country'.

The overwhelming sentiment about Australia is that it is a great country in which to live. There is widespread satisfaction with life in Australia. When the respondents were asked to express their thoughts and feelings about Australia, good and bad, first replies were often in terms that were predictable: the country is good because it is safe, with no wars or natural disasters. Sunshine and blue skies, the beaches, the relaxed lifestyle, the abundant space – all were mentioned repeatedly, especially by those who live in Queensland and in regional Western Australia. But the Sydneysiders, too, generally agreed that the quality of life in Australia is "extremely high" or

**one.** Australia is still perceived as the 'lucky country'.

**however...**

There is concern about Australia's future and people feel a lack of control

**two.** Multiculturalism is valued because it allows people to learn from each other.

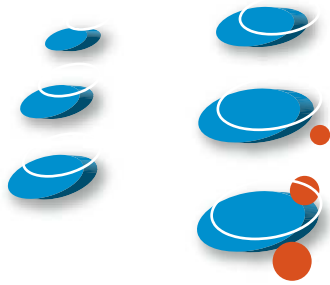
**however...**

Many have concerns about segregation and talk about the need for groups to integrate.

**three.** Many younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds still feel an incomplete acceptance by mainstream society.

**however...**

Interactive cultural diversity is becoming increasingly mainstream.



"just outstanding". For example, Miguel said: "It's a great country, this is why all the people would like to come and live here..." (S4) Many referred to the freedom and democracy they enjoy in this country, as well as its general prosperity and the many opportunities it offers for a comfortable life. Australia is seen as a young and vibrant country where the people are friendly and life is good. Many spoke in superlatives about the country. As Gillie, of Portuguese background, put it:

**"It's wild, it's crazy, it's beautiful, it's fresh, it's clean, full of opportunities. I can't think of another country to make anyone's life flourish as Australia and I just love it."** w4

The 'lucky country' idea is alive among these younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds, but not simply as a parochial illusion, as Horne had it. Horne described early 1960s Australia as a quintessentially inward-looking, suburban nation characterised by an 'innocent happiness', ignorant of and indifferent to what was happening in the world at large, especially in Asia. For many in the focus groups, however, who are migrants or children of migrants, Australia's 'lucky country' status was based on a knowledgeable comparison with other parts of the world, especially their own or their parents' or grandparents' country of origin.

Ducy: **"I see a lot of good things. I see it as the cup half-full because of the opportunities that I have in Australia compared to what my parents had in Vietnam. Communism and democracy are two entirely different things... because if you go back to a communist country and say something about the prime minister or something like that, that will get you sentenced to life in prison, just like that."** B1

Kaylea: **"Yeah, it's easy to have a lifestyle because there's not a lot of crime in Australia, like in South Africa there's so much crime, like you can't even go out, like I'd never walk out of my house alone without someone there, and here we can go for walks like at midnight and still be safe..."** B1

This doesn't mean that there were no bad things mentioned. One respondent found Australian culture "crass... not refined" – referring to "just the people, they'll be sort of like real beer drinkers...". (W6) Another found the country "boring" compared with other countries.

Irene: **"I went to Hong Kong a few months ago and I'm convinced I want to stay there. Here is so slow. Every night there is like New Year's, they close off the streets, and over here it's so slow, like at night time there's like two people on the streets."** s3

Others felt the impact of Australia's physical remoteness from the rest of the world.

Siobhan: **"The only one downside I think is, for example the reason why I see so many friends move to places like England, is how close they are to visit all the other countries in the world. That's the only downside for me."** s1

Yet this remoteness was also seen as "a good thing", in that Australia was seen as being sheltered from the major trouble spots of the world. Darek, from Broome, simply stated: "The good thing is that we're isolated. I consider isolation a good thing". (W6) Some referred to terrorist attacks in other countries and felt reassured that Australia had not been a target so far.



Paul: "You get different feelings too when you know someone in these countries too. My best mate's a police officer in London and he had to deal with all the bombings in London and thank God he's arriving tomorrow, coming back to Australia to live..." B4

In this respect, one might wonder whether Australia is not too lucky. The valuing of isolation as a national safeguard against global turmoil may produce a sense of detachment from the world. This may lead to inward-looking complacency or 'quietism', a stance expressed especially by some Western Australia respondents. Evarna, from Bunbury, who couldn't think of anything to say when first asked what was good or bad about Australia, later said: "in Bunbury nothing major happens, it's just quiet", which she considered a good thing. (W1)

In short, almost everyone felt fortunate to be living in Australia and had overwhelmingly positive assessments of the country. This resonates with the survey results from *Living Diversity*, which produced the intriguing finding that overall, migrants tended to have more satisfaction with Australian society than long-time Australians (2002: 47-8). We shouldn't be surprised by this. Australia's relative economic prosperity, social and political stability, and the general quality of life it affords people compare well with many other countries where immigrants often come from.

## however...

### There is concern about Australia's future and people feel a lack of control.

#### "I DON'T KNOW WHERE IT'S LEADING ANYMORE"

Although they perceived Australia as a 'lucky country', many respondents expressed a strong concern, if not anxiety about what lies ahead for Australians. When questioned further, they did not have a great sense of optimism or confidence about Australia's future. Several groups expressed a sense that things were "getting worse" or "getting harder and harder", and many blamed the media for inducing such feelings (see Findings 6-7). Saba expressed it this way:

"I like to be optimistic about the future but the problem we're having is all the media is making the future bleak. They keep hammering us with terrorism, the environment, water issues, and they won't tell us what is good about the future, what to look forward to. So all we're getting hammered with is just the negative side of the future. It's hard to stay optimistic." S4

Mark, in the same group, agreed that "we probably see it as darker than it really is because we've got more media feeding us stories" (S4) and referred to the fact that these days "everyone can get on the Internet and spout their opinion". Many others simply said that they often found the news too upsetting: "I get turned off by the fact that there's so much terribleness in the world... and I just won't follow the news for a while". (W3)

**one.** Australia is still perceived as the 'lucky country'.  
**however...**  
There is concern about Australia's future and people feel a lack of control.

**two.** Multiculturalism is valued because it allows people to learn from each other.  
**however...**  
Many have concerns about segregation and talk about the need for groups to integrate.

**three.** Many younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds still feel an incomplete acceptance by mainstream society.  
**however...**  
Interactive cultural diversity is becoming increasingly mainstream.

These respondents seemed to reiterate the well-known complaint that the media are too preoccupied with “bad news” (see Findings 7 and 9). Regardless of whether the media can be held responsible for a sense of gloom about the state of the world, there was clear agreement that, as Miguel put it, “we are living every day with a high level of uncertainty...”. (S4) A common sentiment was that “I don’t know where it’s leading anymore”. (S3)

### **“THE EARTH IS SO OUT OF WHACK NOW”**

One of the most frequently mentioned issues facing the world was the environment. Grace, in Bunbury, spoke for many when she said that:

“The world [is] generally in a state of degradation... a lot of things [are] not within the control of us and not even the politicians however they like to manipulate, like catastrophes, diseases, natural disasters...” w2

Some fastened their hope on technological progress, but overall, technology alone was not considered to be enough to secure the future.

Jasmin: “I think... the future of technology and advancements is a good thing because a quarter of my problems will be solved by advancements in technology, but there’re things that you can’t fix, like the ozone layer and things like that.” B1

Similarly, Evarna believed that technology could help, for example, in tracking down terrorists, “but then so much is happening all at once it might not be able to keep up with all of it”. (W1) Others pointed to the downside of technology, predicting that “in 20 years from now we’re just going to find that... we just rely too much on technology instead of relying on other people”. (W1) Christian, too, thought that technology could be “a help and a hindrance”:

“... the more powerful we get or the more understanding we have of technology, the more we misuse it. I mean we use it for good and we also use it for bad. It’s like we’re balancing at the moment.” s6

These sorts of comments suggest that a major anxiety is lack of control over where the world – and Australia – is going. In Carnarvon, for example, when asked about the future, Markham said that “Australia will be alright...”, but others in the group retorted that “we might all be wiped out by bird flu”. (W3) Many were worried that terrorism would soon affect

“... I am extremely grateful to be living in this country. There is nothing I could say bad about it. Yes, you could complain about little things, but [compared to South Africa] where I come from, there is not a chance I would ever say anything bad about Australia.”

**Glenda, 36-40, Mount Ommaney B6**

Australia, stating that “it’s only a matter of time before Sydney is hit by terrorism”. (S2) Marcus, in Bunbury, simply thought that “it’s going to get worse with terrorists”. (W1)

Not surprisingly, terrorism was high on everyone’s list of issues facing Australia. It was said to “take the certainty out of life”, although you could “choose not to be affected by it, choose not to live in fear, like the people in London”. (S2) The threat of terrorism is inherently beyond one’s control: “With terrorism you can’t really do much, like the whole point of it is it’s a surprise attack, so you don’t know what’s going to happen...”. (B1)

### **“PLEASE, WE’RE AUSTRALIA – WE’RE NOT AMERICA”**

Discussions of terrorism revealed remarkably strong discontent about the Government’s close relationship with the United States. The belief that Australia has become a terrorist target because of this relationship was widespread. “The only reason [terrorism] is our problem is because of America”, said one Sydney respondent. (S3) Respondents from Broome thought that “we are following in George Bush’s footsteps too much. We are just leaving ourselves open for a terrorist attack” and, “It’s like we are being bullied into helping the Americans.” (W4) A Brisbane respondent similarly believed that Australia is “politically weak... we’re just a right hand man for America really...”. (B3)

Overall, dismay that Australia is becoming “too Americanised” was a recurring theme. As Nu, in Bunbury, said: “Are we Australia or are we America?” (W2) Rita, in Sydney, said that Australia “is a great country but it’s becoming worse and it’s becoming more American...”. (S4) Many expressed the view that Australia needs to be more independent – not only for its own security but also, more broadly, to safeguard its own identity. Darek, from Broome, summed it up this way:

**“Australia is lacking in independence pretty much, with toddling along behind Britain and America... which restricts freedom of expression, invention, independence, creation of national identity. Identity is mingled too much with economic values which depreciates the human factor.”** w6

This comment points to broader concerns about the global direction of the world and Australia’s place in it. In particular, there was strong resentment against the global hegemony of the United States and this was a key factor in the lack of control people expressed. As Osama, a recent refugee migrant from Sudan living in Sydney, said about the future:

**“For me, it’s unknown. Because there’s a lot of globalisation, is negative; like the world is owned by the US, war everywhere, they are ready to integrate everywhere, if they don’t obey them, they just, tomorrow they come and stay in your country.”** s4

**one.** Australia is still perceived as the ‘lucky country’.

#### **however...**

There is concern about Australia’s future and people feel a lack of control.

**two.** Multiculturalism is valued because it allows people to learn from each other.

#### **however...**

Many have concerns about segregation and talk about the need for groups to integrate.

**three.** Many younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds still feel an incomplete acceptance by mainstream society.

#### **however...**

Interactive cultural diversity is becoming increasingly mainstream.

In summary, Australia is still perceived as the 'lucky country', but people are acutely aware that Australia's future is bound up with the world. Many challenges facing the world – such as terrorism, global warming and epidemics – transcend national boundaries, and Australia cannot be quarantined from them. In this sense, our respondents do have a global consciousness – an alertness to the realities of globalisation – which isn't always a reassuring thing for them.

This leads to a paradox: people are more open to the world but also more fearful, both of it and for it. As Christian put it:

**"... they say we have globalisation but I feel borders are starting to close in again and that people are becoming more scared to branch out and open their wings."** <sup>56</sup>

Such a contradictory combination of openness to the world and a desire to retreat from it is indicative of the complex mix of hope and fear the focus group participants held for Australia and its future. This paradoxical blend of acceptance and mistrust is also characteristic of attitudes towards multiculturalism.

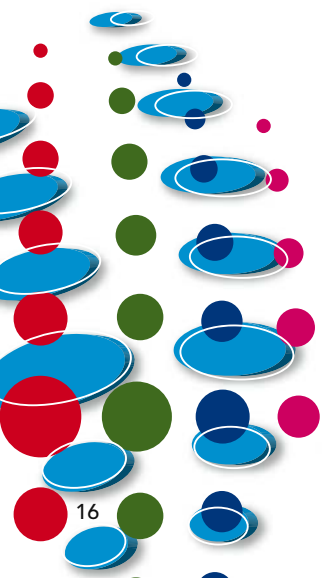
## **two.** Multiculturalism is valued because it allows people to learn from each other.

In *Living Diversity* we found that a narrow majority (52%) of Australians supported multiculturalism – defined as the opportunity for migrants to maintain their cultural identity. People of non-English speaking backgrounds, however, were much more supportive of multiculturalism (78%) than the national population. Moreover, the survey revealed that younger people were significantly more positive about multiculturalism than older people.

It is therefore not surprising that the focus group participants – younger people of culturally diverse backgrounds – had overwhelmingly favourable views about multiculturalism. Unprompted, several respondents referred to "multicultural" society as one of the "good" things about Australia. Across all age groups and locations, positive attitudes towards multiculturalism prevailed, and not just in a superficial sense. While a diversity of restaurants and multicultural festivals were often mentioned as some of the benefits of multiculturalism, what came through most powerfully in the focus group discussions was much more profound.

### **"SHARING CULTURES AND SHARING IDEAS AND OPINIONS"**

What people seem to value most about multiculturalism is that it makes people more open to other cultures, and open to change. In other words, multiculturalism enables you to learn from others. Sven, when asked what he thought about multiculturalism, summed it up well:



“Very good, because you learn something when you meet people from other countries, you pick up something and become more tolerant to other cultures, and that is important...” B3

Tracey, too, thought that multiculturalism was “really good” because “you get to meet people that you wouldn’t normally meet and you get to learn about different cultures and different ways and that”. (B4) Siti, who is a second-generation Australian with a Malaysian background, and said that she was picked on when she was growing up “because I’m from a different culture”, also believed that it was good because “when you meet all these other people from these other countries... we get a better understanding of why they do certain things”. (W1)

We heard this again and again: the ethnic and cultural diversity created and promoted by multiculturalism provided a positive learning experience, broadened horizons and enhanced understanding, “just to understand that different doesn’t mean bad”. (Thay, B3) As Lisa said:

“I guess we’re all multicultural... I’m an early Australian, well my grandparents and whatnot came from Germany and England and places like that, so I never really think I’m only Australian, but it’s great to get all the different foods and all the different customs and all the different things we’re learning from having a wide region of different people around us...” B4

A Sydneysider of similar background described a more personal reason why multiculturalism had taught him “more patience and understanding”. “My religion is kind of Protestant, I’m a white guy, true-blue Aussie... but I married an Asian Catholic girl, so I have to relax my rules a lot...”. (S2)

## “I GUESS WE’RE ALL MULTICULTURAL”

It is important to stress here that multiculturalism is seen as a particularly Australian experience. Multiculturalism is closely associated with Australia’s status as an immigrant society, which has brought people into the country from all over the world. For many of our respondents, living in a country where so many different cultures have come together is a new experience. As Christian, of Chilean background living in Liverpool said, “in Australia you get to see people... from countries you’ve never heard of”. (S6) He added that “this doesn’t happen as much in Chile”. Shu Chuan, from Taiwan, who now lives in Bunbury, said much the same thing: “I think it makes me feel more open-minded and to accept more different races... because in our country everyone is Chinese... you come here and you learn to respect other people”. (W2)

Many felt that living in multicultural Australia had taught them to become more tolerant and respectful towards others. In other words, multiculturalism has a cosmopolitanising effect: not only does it combat cultural insularity, it also makes one appreciative of the fact that cultural diversity is what makes Australia. As one Chatswood/Willoughby participant put it, “Australia is what it is because of the amount of different cultures that have come to the country, and our families and those backgrounds are what makes the country now what it is...”. (S2)

A young Broome resident, who was very patriotic, put his view eloquently:

Karl: “Australia is a multicultural nation and I’m proud of it being a multicultural nation, I want to look after it and protect it and keep it the way that it is... be able to go to school and have all different types of people from different races and places.” W5

**one.** Australia is still perceived as the ‘lucky country’.  
**however...**  
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Many have concerns about segregation and talk about the need for groups to integrate.

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‘Interactive’ cultural diversity is becoming increasingly mainstream.

Multiculturalism, then, was perceived as a defining characteristic of Australian society, and most felt strongly attached to it. There was also a strong sense that Australian multiculturalism is maturing, especially with the coming of age of the second generation of immigrants. A good example is Jenny, of Croatian background living in Liverpool, who recounted how her parents were very strict when she was growing up and only allowed her to have Croatian friends, even though she was born in Australia. "I think I was a bit racist when I was younger too, like Croatians are best, you know." (S6) It was only after she finished high school and did welfare work with people of different ages and backgrounds that she "realised that I like other countries, you know other cultures and it really opened my eyes up and I was arguing with my parents [about] the way they thought". These days, she said, they have changed.

When people value multiculturalism it is mostly because it allows them to connect with a diverse range of people and cultures. As Grace, who described herself as Malaysian Australian, said, multiculturalism is "generally good when it's embraced the right way", that is, "if people are more willing to reach out to the other cultural groups and embrace them as themselves". (W2)

**however...**  
Many have concerns about segregation and talk about the need for groups to integrate.

#### **"POCKETS OF ISOLATION"**

Approval of multiculturalism was not unqualified. What is negative about it, according to many participants, is that it may lead to inter-ethnic or intercultural tension and conflict. This can happen, they said, if there is not enough 'reaching out' between groups. Many referred to the dangers of 'tribalism' often associated with multicultural societies, bringing up images of 'race wars' or clashes between cultures, religions, and so on. Glenda, from South Africa, for example, believed that multiculturalism doesn't work well "because everybody keeps to their own culture". (B6)

To counter this danger, respondents spoke of the need for migrant groups to adapt to the Australian way of life and to "integrate". As Nu, of Thai background, said:

**"Multiculturalism is a good thing but you've also got to have integration involved with it otherwise it doesn't work... If you are going to come to a certain country it's valuable to retain some aspects of your culture, but you've also got to be able to integrate into the culture."** w2

This view was expressed repeatedly. Interestingly, it was often articulated by people who themselves had to make the transition to live in Australia. They pointed to, and expressed disapproval of, the separatism of others, "even within your own community". (S4) Indeed, many considered separatism as working *against* multiculturalism, which was

mostly seen as a philosophy of 'living together'. Osama, for example, said that multiculturalism is "not happening" because "there are many ethnic backgrounds in Australia but they are living in their own groups".(S4) The implication is that multiculturalism should be about *intercultural connection*, not about segregated groups.

Michael, third-generation, Scottish-Danish background: **"I think when people come to Australia from other countries they should be friends with everyone, but sometimes they just sort of stick in their own little minority, in their own little group, and I don't really agree with that..."** B3

There were many complaints about "pockets of isolation" that different ethnic groups were perceived as creating.

Julie, first-generation, born in Lithuania: **"Different ethnic groups stick together. Like Dee Why is Little Serbia. Every second person in Dee Why is Serbian. Hurlstone Park is Lithuanian... It's unbelievable... Very much pockets. Cabramatta – Vietnamese..."** s2

Needless to say, these images of 'ethnic ghettos' are highly exaggerated: none of these suburbs is actually monopolised by a single ethnic group; they all have highly diverse populations. The sociological reality is that there are no 'ethnic ghettos' in Australia (as shown in the findings the 2002 *Living Diversity* report) even though certain areas, especially in Sydney – Bankstown, Cabramatta – have often been represented as such (Poulsen, Johnston & Forrest, 2004).

Moreover, comments such as these only refer to non-Anglo groups: neighbourhoods that are predominantly Anglo are not generally named as "pockets of isolation". The continuing hegemony of Anglo-Australian culture as the core culture of Australia is more or less accepted as a given. What these comments point to is a certain unease with publicly visible forms of social and cultural segregation as was dramatically demonstrated during the riots at Cronulla in Sydney in December 2005.

### **"WE'RE ALL AUSSIES"**

In some instances, disapproval of separatism was coupled with a demand for 'assimilation', though exactly what respondents meant by this word is unclear. For example, a Brisbane participant claimed that "it's hard for them to assimilate if they stick to their own group". (B5)

The word 'assimilation' carries controversial historical baggage: as a policy concept it is associated with the requirement imposed on migrants to become fully absorbed into the dominant culture and with a denial of the right of minority groups to maintain their different cultures and identities ('assimilation' literally means 'becoming same'). This requirement was overturned by the introduction of multicultural policies in the 1970s, which were based precisely on the *recognition* of minority cultures. As a social philosophy, assimilationism is no longer officially endorsed (see Jupp, 2002).

While assimilationist sentiments were expressed in the groups, people more commonly used less dogmatic words such as 'adapt' or 'adjust' to describe what they expected from newcomers. Demands for integration into the "Australian way of life" were particularly strong among some of the Brisbane groups.

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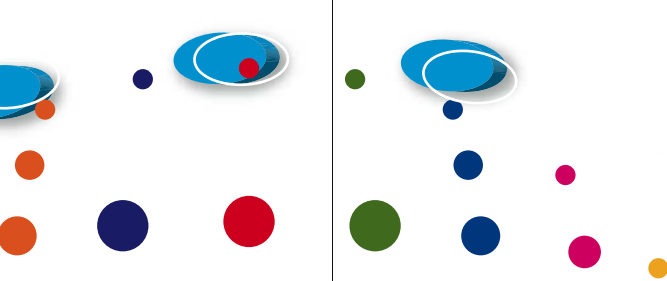
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Tracey, first-generation, born in New Zealand: "Well if they want our lifestyle – they come to Australia because they want a better life for their family and that –would it entail, coming to Australia to live, where you basically, you are becoming Australian. Even though you have your cultures and that sort of thing and the things that you bring with you... you still need to adapt, to live within the Australian way of life." B4

Sven, first-generation, Swedish-German background: "I guess sometimes you get the feeling that they don't want to mix with Australians. They are happy to be in a group and that's it. They don't want to speak English or they don't want to mix with Australians. And I guess if you come here from overseas, you've got to make an effort to mix also with the local group." B3

There are intolerant undertones in such statements, which show a lack of patience and understanding for the situation of migrant groups whose cultural habits and values seem too divergent from what is perceived as normal. Integration, then, can be a double-edged sword: often, the demand for integration (or assimilation) is a manifestation of intolerance towards difference.

### **"TALK ENGLISH"**

One of the most common areas where this demand for integration is made is language. Multilingualism – one of the key elements of a broader multiculturalism – produced great unease among many of the focus group participants. The fact that many migrants speak languages other than English is often frowned upon. It makes people uncomfortable, even those who have a family history of speaking languages other than English at home. Migrants speaking their native tongue in public is often seen as a refusal to integrate. As Nu said:

"Well I mean I think a few years back there was an issue about... the Vietnamese community and the Chinese community staying within themselves and actually not wanting to learn the language of the country, and not wanting to associate themselves with the people that were there..." W2

One of the participants in Mount Ommaney complained about the Chinese and other students in his school.

"You can't be friends with them... they talk in their own language, and even if you say to them, like our teachers say, 'Talk English'... and then they still talk their own language... it's weird. It's hard to talk to people if they are not even trying to make an effort." B5

Another respondent agreed: "At school all the Asian people sit in their own group, all the Australian boys sit in another group somewhere..." (B5)

However, others made the point that the criticism shouldn't be levelled only at new migrant groups, but also at members of the dominant group. As Sven said: "It goes both ways... we have to go like Australians, but Australians also have to be able to join a group of other cultures as well." (B3) Donna, of English-Irish background, added that it is because "Aussies might be racist towards other people" that those others were not mingling.

"If they don't want to give those Asians a chance, if they don't want to go and meet them, and say, 'How are you guys going?', play footy, whatever, then that is being just as bad isn't it, as them sticking in their group?" B3

Here, integration is put forward as a two-way street. More generally, the issue of integration is formulated in terms of a precarious "balance". As Tania, from New Zealand, put it:



"You've got to find some sort of balance that allows people to still embrace their culture, be allowed to live where they want to live, even if it's within their own group, but have some sort of harmony on what's acceptable for all of us as far as what we will tolerate and won't tolerate..." <sup>S4</sup>

In short, multiculturalism is valued if it means that people of different backgrounds are willing to mix and interact together. Tegan, a participant in one of the Inala/Richlands groups, expressed the paradox well:

"It's good, multiculturalism, because we are able to be so different, but it's bad in the aspect where people do let their cultural differences get in the way of being, like, we're all Aussies but like they do." <sup>B1</sup>

The paradox here is that diversity is seen as both good and bad, and there are clear limits to what people find acceptable levels of difference. Difference that leads to separateness and disconnection is generally not tolerated, and there is little sympathy for groups that are seen to keep themselves apart.

To sum up, Richard's perspective is worth quoting at length because he displayed an eloquent instance of the empathy that comes from understanding both sides of the paradox:

"When they don't mix they tend to create a feeling of conflict, even if they're not actively doing it, they passively do it. They say, you know, we're not going to mix with you now. Sometimes I think it's just because they get together with people they know. I know when my mother came out she did the same, as an English person, they mixed with other English people because it was who they knew and the people were comfortable with it, they could talk about back home, and talk about the same things quite comfortably... together.

And I think that there's a lot of that. I guess it just seems to create a 'Why aren't you doing things the way we do things when you come to our country?' sort of thing that happens. That's what I see happening... I don't get that feeling, no. But I've had the shoe on the other foot. I've been overseas and had it labelled at me, 'Why aren't you speaking my language in my country?'... Having the shoe on the other foot? Look, I wasn't over there for long and I got a quick grasp of just how unpleasant it could be. And I suppose I just take a minute to pause now before I make a quick judgement." <sup>B2</sup>

## three.

### Many younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds still feel an incomplete acceptance by mainstream society.

#### "WE'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE RACIST, BUT WE ARE"

The paradox highlighted in the previous section – both the embrace of multiculturalism and misgivings about its potential for divisiveness – reveals that the ideal of a harmonious multicultural Australia is not yet a reality or, at least, not completely. Indeed, many respondents expressed their regret that not everyone is accepting of it. Tracey, for example, said that "on the bad side I don't think that there is as much tolerance out there as there should be". (B4) Salvatore, in Carnarvon, found it an issue that "ideally we should be loving and compassionate to each other and get to know each other and that doesn't always happen". (W4) Lotte, too, who is of Dutch background but who had lived in many countries, felt "really sad... when people

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are discriminated against". (W2) Natalie, who is second-generation Australian, of Maltese background, feels it is "a shame" that some people don't "embrace multiculturalism". (S5)

Stories about discrimination, prejudice and intolerance were told by many. Several participants had personal experiences of being the object of "racism", a term used regularly when they told stories about those experiences. This varied from mild forms of name-calling to more severe forms of bigotry. Not surprisingly, people of non-European backgrounds were far more likely to tell stories of racism than white European people. Naomi complained:

**"It's supposed to be accepting of other cultures... I don't really believe we are that multicultural. My Dad is Malaysian and in grade six I got called some awful names... I don't think I even look that Asian, and it's not right. It makes me believe that we really aren't that accepting..."** B5

Osama complained about the constant discrimination he experiences, partly because of his name and his Sudanese background. "I face racism every day." He believed that his failure to get a job despite his TAFE accountancy degree was due to a "racist way of seeing things". (S4) Genete, of Eritrean background, felt that she was treated with contempt by a superior at work in a hospital because she is black, adding that "I am not dog". (B2) Kelly, second-generation, Hong Kong background, told the story of when someone exclaimed "I fucking hate Asian people" in a bar she was at: "I don't actually get it often, but I get really mad when I hear racial comments, especially directed at me or not even particularly at me, they can say it to me, to my face". (S1)

Intolerance also occurs with regard to language and religion. Christian, of Chilean background, found Australians "a bit racist" for this reason: "they hate it when you're talking your language in front of them. They get annoyed". (S6) He thinks that such linguistic intolerance is "very narrow-minded", but added: "That's uneducated Australians I believe". Of course, this view contrasts sharply with the "Talk English" admonition highlighted in Finding 2. At the same time, Lena, of Russian background, related that even if you do speak English, you may still be discriminated against because of your accent.

**Lena: "I usually work as a customer service officer... so I deal with incoming calls, enquiries, I give quotes to customers over the phone... and some customers have complained... some Australians do not have the patience and tolerance to ethnics with accent, which cost me my job, twice."** B6

Religious intolerance was an often mentioned theme, not surprisingly in relation to Muslims. Rachel, of third-generation, German, Hungarian and Jewish background, made this insightful comment about the predicament of Muslims in Australia at present:

**"Obviously at the moment, I suspect if you're Muslim you would have to really draw upon your Muslim community because everyone would look at you and there'd be a lot of people saying comments. I saw something on the TV about a Muslim couple in Melbourne and they have had horrible things happen to them and comments. So I can see that possibly now to be a Muslim you would actually have to say am I one or am I not, if I am I really am. I definitely feel that they may be forced into a corner at the moment."** B4

It shouldn't be a surprise that intolerance is a common phenomenon in Australian society. Interestingly though, this is not considered an exclusively white or Anglo problem. Other groups could be "racist" as well. Vanessa said that her Aboriginal father was a racist: "He'd say things like 'Bloody Yanks' or derogative things about Asian cultures or whatever, and I used to think 'You're the biggest bloody racist around!', you know what I mean". She believed that this was because, living "in a town out west" in Queensland, "he wasn't exposed to all this sort of stuff". (B4) Cathy, of Croatian background, went so far as to claim, after complaining about Asians being racist, that "we", that is, Australians, are quite racist: "We're trying to come across like we're not racist, but we are". (S4)

Margarita, of Spanish background and living in Carnarvon, criticised "the underlying racism that's within Australia" and observed from her personal point of view the different kinds of racism across the country:

"Well... I grew up over east, two migrant parents, so I've seen racism towards migrants. But since being in Western Australia, and living in Carnarvon, I've seen more racism towards Indigenous and Indigenous towards white people as well. It's definitely gone both ways. So I've seen the two spectrums yeah, your migrant racism to Indigenous racism as well." w4

In Broome, as in Carnarvon, tension between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people was a particularly prominent topic. As one young Broome resident said, "it is generally Aboriginals versus everyone else". Referring to his friend, who is of Filipino background, he explained:

"It doesn't matter like [he] is still pretty dark skinned but they know that he is not Aboriginal so he will get the same sort of strife that I would get walking through Anne Street. It is either you are or you are not." w5

What these young people were referring to seems to be an extreme problem. It highlights how Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations can be even more intractable than race relations involving non-Indigenous culturally diverse people. What undeniably emerges from all the focus groups is that racism is an everyday experience, and no one is really exempt from it.

In fact, some explicitly racist comments were articulated during the group sessions. For example one participant who is of second-generation, Croatian background, confessed that she was "prejudiced against Indian and Pakistani people" and that she didn't "like their cultures". (S4) The man sitting next to her during the session was of Indian background. After making her statement she turned to him and apologised, "I am racist, sorry". At which he responded: "... no, no that's alright... you can express your own opinion".

**however...**  
Interactive cultural diversity is becoming increasingly mainstream.

#### **"PUT OUR DIFFERENCES ASIDE"**

Despite occurrences of intercultural and inter-racial tension, there is also a clear sense that Australia has become increasingly accepting of cultural diversity and capable of living with difference. As participants in one of the Sydney groups commented, "we've all come to Australia to better ourselves"; and because "we're all immigrants", other than the

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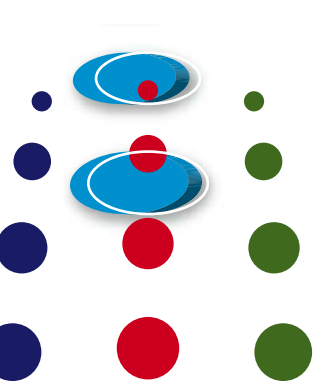
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Indigenous Australians, “we are more tolerant in that way... We all have our own opinions and prejudices but at least we can learn to live with others and accept the things as they are...”. (S4)

Others expressed their delight in the fact that people from different countries and cultural backgrounds can live in harmony in multicultural Australia. Kylie from Carnarvon for example related that she has “heaps of friends that... have come from all walks of life”, and added that “it’s great that we can all get along and all put our differences aside [and]... be able to come together as one”. (W3) Ross, from Broome, contended that when you get to know the people it is the similarities that become more prominent: “I have friends [from] different cultures and stuff like that, they’re just not different from you or any other person”. (W5)

At the same time – and this brings us back to the value of multiculturalism in providing an opportunity to learn from others – some respondents were pleased about knowing people who come from different backgrounds. As Dean said, talking about his Italian girlfriend: “It actually gives you a good feeling knowing a friend that’s come from a different country and they can share their history with you”. (W5)

There was a general belief among the participants that compared with 10 to 20 years ago there is now more acceptance and awareness of diversity in Australia. Margarita observed that there has been a “huge, huge change” from the time her parents first migrated from Spain. Then, she said, the expectation of assimilation was paramount: “I know when my parents arrived they were told they had to do what the Australians did” and “they were strongly encouraged to give Spanish away and speak English in the home”. Today, however, things have changed profoundly and “people feel more able to be prouder of their culture... or to speak about

their culture more...”. (W4) Others agreed: “We’ve got more of an understanding of multiculturalism because we’ve experienced it, and we’re part of it”. (S2) Mardi, from Brisbane, put it this way:

**“I think that people today are more accepting and more willing to take on new cultures and they’re putting that into their children, so their children are more accepting of different cultures.”** <sup>B2</sup>

### **“MULTICULTURALISM IS WHAT MAKES AUSTRALIA”**

In *Living Diversity* we found that younger generations, of all backgrounds, tended to be much more positive towards multiculturalism than older ones. Consistent with this, Ritika, who is of Indian background, claimed that younger people, from mid-30s down, “know much better about multiculturalism”.

**“... they are more accepting than what might be like say my parents or any of your parents, and I think that one of the best things you can probably do to combat things like discrimination in different cultures is to educate the parents because that’s where the origination of the bias or stereotype comes from.”** <sup>S3</sup>

Speaking about his parents’ generation, Shivnesh, of Fijian-Indian background, said that “they are living too much in the past”, stating that if he had a girlfriend from another cultural background “my parents would be very critical about it”. (S5)

Significantly, Shivnesh argued against such inward-looking cultural protectionism and strongly supported people mixing in a connecting, interactive multiculturalism: “people think that the culture’s fading by mixing around but I think we’re just learning more cultures”. He added that: “we’re all

mixing around now so I think people are just getting used to it... So I think we're going the right way".

There was general agreement that multiculturalism has come a long way in Australia. As Saba, in his late 30s and of Syrian background, put it, it is "happening a lot more than how it used to be". "When I was growing up, multiculturalism wasn't around, I mean, there were just Australians and wogs." He added that "there's still a long way to go to become totally multicultural in this country, but it's getting there". (S4) Christian, similarly said: "I'd like to think that there isn't any Aussies and wogs there's just Australia, whatever country you come from" because "multiculturalism is what makes Australia". (S6) In Carnarvon, Margarita, also noted that "there's definitely a few mixtures of cultures and essentially everyone gets on pretty well" despite some covert racism. (W4)

'Multicultural humour' is one sign of a more relaxed sense of difference and an ability to make fun of it, although this remains a sensitive affair. Kavindra (17) of second-generation, Fijian-Indian background from Brisbane, told of the name-calling that occurred at school and said he has been called a "curry muncher". Another participant in the same group, who'd also been called names, said he didn't mind it because "it was mucking around" but "other people would try and offend you, so there's a fine line between... having fun and trying to insult someone". (B5)

What all these comments suggest is that interactive cultural diversity, where people are at ease with difference despite continuing tensions, is becoming an increasingly mainstream experience for many younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds.

## Considerations

Multicultural Australia today is a country of paradoxes. The focus groups indicate that most younger Australians of diverse cultural backgrounds feel positive about their lives in Australia, although they feel somewhat insecure about what the future holds in today's uncertain world.

While the value of multiculturalism is almost universally endorsed, it is clearly still unfinished business in practice. In all of the focus groups, discussion about multiculturalism was wide-ranging, revealing ambivalences that point to the limits of tolerance and unease about excessive difference.

The paradox is that the wholehearted goodwill towards the ideal of multiculturalism is offset by anxiety about some of its realities. This tension may be inevitable, given the experimental nature of multiculturalism as a social philosophy and cultural policy. In a globalising world in which diversity has become an inevitable fact of life, multiculturalism provides a perspective which encourages peaceful coexistence and living together. But this is something that people learn over time. And as the focus group discussions reveal, most *enjoy* learning it.

Multicultural Australia, in short, is a work in progress in which younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds have a dedicated stake. Above all, our research shows that the kind of multiculturalism they value most is one where differences interact: a *connecting diversity*.

**one.** Australia is still perceived as the 'lucky country'.

**however...**  
There is concern about Australia's future and people feel a lack of control.

**two.** Multiculturalism is valued because it allows people to learn from each other.

**however...**  
Many have concerns about segregation and talk about the need for groups to integrate.

**three.** Many culturally diverse Australians still feel an incomplete acceptance by mainstream society

**however...**  
Interactive cultural diversity is becoming increasingly mainstream.

## What other challenges are facing Australia at the moment?

"I once had a school assignment I had to do on multiculturalism and it was just like a very naïve idea maybe... I wrote that Australia is like a train picking up passengers from all these different countries but it doesn't really have a destination, because once you have people from all these different countries they try to part themselves out.

Like, I know I feel more a sense of belonging to an Indian community because I'm originally from India and I would participate more in those kind of things. It corresponds the same way to other people who belong to different cultures as well. So I don't know if this train is going somewhere or if it's just going to keep on going around and around, and then you've got people like the Aborigines who are the true people of Australia and you've got to cater for those people as well and their needs.

There isn't really a line or a barrier which says okay, well, you're satisfied now it's the next group's turn or, you know, making sure that all the groups are satisfied and if they ever will be...

And I was talking to a friend the other day and she said her friend had to go out to a TAFE for an interview and she was wearing her scarf, and she was not allowed to go through because she was wearing a scarf. And I was very shocked because we are living in a country where these things are written down in law... you can't just do that. And she wasn't brave enough to speak out and say why. But this is still happening... I mean, discrimination still happens.

Even though we've got a society where multiculturalism and cultural diversity is very appreciated but you've still got things like this happening. And it's inevitable as well, even if you go to, like, get a job or things like that, they are always biased."

**Ritika, first-generation, Indian, 18, Strathfield/Burwood/Ashfield S3**

# WAYS OF BELONGING TO AUSTRALIA

## Introduction

In *Living Diversity* we used the phrase 'everyday cosmopolitanism' to describe the openness to cultural difference that resulted from people-mixing – at work, and in leisure and consumption – in multicultural Australia. We discussed the various forms of this people-mixing and the institutions in which it occurred, and the kinds of 'hybrid lives' it shaped, but we only briefly explored its consequences regarding senses of belonging. We raised a concern, for example, about the *incomplete* sense of belonging felt by many Australians of diverse backgrounds. In this section, we further examine some of the issues around the paradoxes of living in multicultural Australia which were raised in the previous section, and consider questions of identity and attachment that emerged in the focus groups. We address the multilayered nature of belonging in a culturally and socially pluralistic nation like Australia. Competing forms of belonging to Australia have profound effects on a sense of cohesion and community. Critics of multiculturalism often present these forms of belonging as a threat to national community, but, forms of belonging are more complicated than simplistic assumptions about the primacy of ethnic identities. Moreover, such forms of belonging pose broader questions about social exclusion and the ways people negotiate differences in daily life.

## four.

There are many different ways of belonging in and to Australia.

### MULTIPLE BELONGINGS

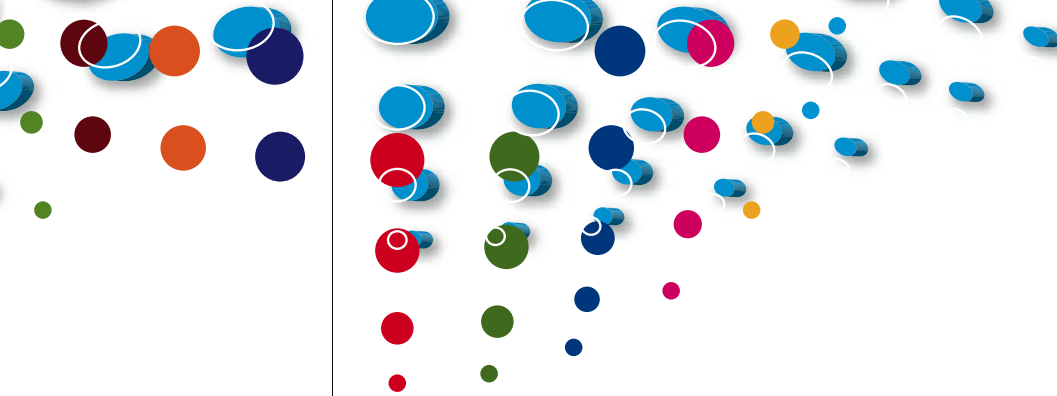
The responses to multicultural Australia that we describe only make sense when we acknowledge the multiple forms of 'belonging' in contemporary Australia. People have many ways of being different and being the same; of belonging and of dividing. There is a tendency in discussions of cultural diversity to assume that ethnicity is the central way people identify and associate themselves with others. However, the focus groups revealed that there are multiple forms of belonging for young people in Australian society. Rather than seeing this only as a source of fragmentation and disunity, our research suggests that this may also contribute to a sense of *enablement* and *engagement* because it multiplies the ways in which people can connect. It is also important because it shows how cultural identity exists in relation to other forms of social and national belonging: it is not always in competition with them but weaves in and out and between the various ways people identify. These forms of belonging are based on an array of social domains and categories beyond ethnicity and nation: generation, gender, work, school and

**four.** There are many different ways of belonging in and to Australia.

**however...**  
These belongings may also cause confusion or division.

**five.** Forms of exclusion and discrimination undermine senses of belonging.  
**however...**  
Cultural differences are generally managed with 'practical tolerance'.





leisure, region, town and neighbourhood, friendships and subcultures, religion and so on.

Understandably, given that the focus groups consisted of younger Australians organised in discrete age bands, identification of themselves as a distinct age group was common. They were also asked questions about their parents' generations. Shu Chuan, when asked about her parents' use of media, answered that "we are the generation to start it, [to] use [the] computer". (W2) This form of generational belonging was echoed by Romar when that group was asked what communities they felt part of: "everything really, like young groups". (W2) In other circumstances, however, generation was a key form of identification even if not prompted by questions. Mardi, in her mid-20s, thought that Australia was becoming more tolerant because her generation was raised differently to previous generations:

"I think it's slowly getting better because people a bit older than us, 10 to 15 years, maybe even 20, the way they were raised is different to the way we are raised today, and our children are raised. And I think that people today are more accepting and more willing to take on new cultures and they're putting that into their children, so their children are more accepting of different cultures. And I think that you find [the] odd person here and there – you get the parent, you get the child! – but if you sat the child down and actually asked them what they were saying they'd have no idea because they were repeating what they've heard mum or dad say...

**"[This is] good for the future, we get to bring up our own children in the way we want to, put our own values in someone else."** <sup>B2</sup>

Tim, in his late 30s and of second-generation Greek background, also worried about the conservatism of his parents' generation. Miguel, also in his late 30s and of first-generation, Chilean background, identified a strong sense of outward-looking orientation in his second-generation friends. (S4) Others saw generational differences in attitudes to consumption. They were increasingly living in a "disposable society" compared with the "simple lives" of their parents (Cathy, 40, S4); while some referred to different values regarding having children and families and careers, especially for women. (S1) Some participants also commented on the generational differences with those younger than them. One Sydney participant complained about young kids being a "yes" generation, "they're used to getting everything they want". (S1) So a strong sense of age differences marked their sense of generational belonging.

Others drew on their work and leisure experiences for a sense of attachment. Some, for example, saw their workmates as their main sense of community: "there're only certain people that you can associate with because you're in that industry", "I go out with people that work the same hours as me"; while another talked about feeling "part of the financial community". (S1) Other women in the same group talked about a strong sense of bonding with other women who shared a "common life experience": "like having girl chats". (S1) Others again talked about sporting clubs. Sven talked about being part of "the student community". (B3)



### "I'M NOT REALLY INTO COMMUNITIES"

Interestingly, Lotte, of Dutch background, said one of the strongest senses of belonging she felt was when she was "travelling as a backpacker around Australia... I really felt like I got into the community, the backpacker community... you really identify with the people you meet". (W2) Backpacking is, of course, largely a young person's world, but it is also 'international'. Some of those in the youngest age group saw community primarily in terms of being "just at school with your mates and that you might do something on the weekend together, that's about it". (Chris, W1) Kyle, in the same group, responded by claiming he was "not really into communities. It's just hanging around with mates".

Another in this group listed the various sub-groups that constitute the social life of young people in a place like Bunbury – the "punk section" and "the really permi [permaculture] people", "but we [are] just all kind of mixed together". (W1) Elsewhere, Nick spoke about the "social community" of "hundreds of hippies converging on a property... every couple of weeks". (B3)

Others talked specifically about their own locale as community. One of the Bunbury groups debated whether Western Australia is more tolerant than the east coast because, for Nu, "you're sort of isolated from the world to a good degree where you're not totally directly influenced by current events". (W2) In contrast, another participant in this group said that "I find people in Western Australia quite narrow-minded compared to being over east because we're not exposed to a lot of things." Overall, however, there was a stronger tendency for the Western Australia respondents to talk about their town's community, compared with the city dwellers interviewed in the eastern states, and this was largely attributed to the smallness of the town: "everyone knows someone that

knows someone so you're all kind of linked anyway". (Marijke, W4)

For Richard in Brisbane, belonging was more a question of neighbourhood and suburb; the "active" community in his street meant that everyone knows everyone else. There are "local street festivals", "the churches put on days in the park... you get that feeling of community". (B2) Even around the small group of local shops, "there seems to be so much traffic in that little area, people bumping into each other so frequently that it creates that sense of little community".

Grace, of Malaysian background, nominated her church as the community she feels part of. They were the first to welcome her in Bunbury and that was "what's encouraging me, supporting me". (W2) Like some other respondents, this sense of a religious community was a central aspect of their sense of belonging, partly because it also allowed her to "reach out" to other cultural groups. Siti began by saying, hesitantly, that she felt part of the "Bunbury community" but then added that "I am part of the Islamic community"; then shifted again because "I'm not really in with that – my parents are but, yeah". (W1) Similarly, a Sydneysider said she feels "part of the Jewish community". (S1)

### "I'M TOO USED TO BEING HERE"

For Sharon, in the same group, her sense of "community connections" grew around the women who had children at the same time and in the same hospital as her, but she described this as a group more than a community, and said she has "to go outside of where I live to get to those things all over the place so it's not like knowing your next door neighbour". For others, like Richard and Jennifer in the Inala/Richlands group, "home" was Brisbane. Mardi, began by saying that she "can't imagine living anywhere else" than Australia – "I'm too

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used to being here” – then went on to qualify that because “Australia” is so big. To her, the question ‘Do you feel at home in Australia?’ didn’t make sense:

**“I would even go to say that I feel at home in Brisbane, Queensland, because... I know it. And if I were to go to Sydney I’d be lost and I wouldn’t feel safe. And although it’s part of Australia it’s still not home. Home is where you grew up...”** B2

Jennifer: **“I’ve been here since I was four... so everyone thinks I was born here anyway. I call myself Chinese-Australian, Australian-Chinese, whichever, it doesn’t matter, but I feel very much at home... and call myself Australian.”** B2

An acknowledgement of these different forms of social belonging is important if we are to avoid the constrained and predictable definitions of ethnic and national identities that mar so much contemporary debate about multiculturalism. It is also important because it means we can recognise that people can be many things at the same time, and that people can move between different social and cultural domains in the course of their daily lives. In this regard it is a source of enablement rather than division. Most participants indicated that they moved happily between their various communities and locales. Ducky, 18 and of Vietnamese background, talked about living “back and forth in two separate places”.

**“My friends that I hang around with are all Asians... Personally I don’t like hanging around with one race, and they’re very single-minded when they’re in a big group. I mean, with one person you can reason and you talk to them and share your ideas, but with a bunch of people it’s one-way, it’s the only way... They’re a group of school friends. I’m part of two groups. I’m part of a group of my friends and a group that plays pool, they**

**are multicultural and get along with everyone because you’re all doing one thing you relate to...”** B1

Kylie expressed it best when she said that she was “in one of those strange situations where I’ve sort of managed to get my finger in all [the groups in the community]” except that this wasn’t that strange after all. (W3) In other words, these people weren’t simply torn between two cultures, even if many expressed something of this tension. For others, competing belongings could be more complicated than simply divided loyalties between ethnic homeland and host nation. Margarita, a second-generation Australian of Spanish background, said that she felt part of her local Carnarvon community but also part of a community “back over east” on the other side of Australia where she grew up and where she visits “a couple of times a year”. Spain, to which she still feels attached, ranks lower. (W4) Ross, of Italian background, in the same group told an old joke about how when Pauline Hanson said ‘Wogs should go home’, his grandfather commented, “Which house? I’ve got four!” (W4)

**however...**  
**These belongings may also cause confusion or division.**

#### **“FLOATING THROUGH”**

Despite this generally positive view about attachments to and participation in various social domains, these forms of belonging could be experienced as problems – as we have seen in the anxieties around ‘tribalism’ discussed in Finding 2 – and they could be felt as competing demands that produce a disorientating effect. It is here where the paradoxes of multiculturalism are their sharpest. In contrast to positive responses

noted above, some, like Nu, balked when asked directly which communities they felt part of and indicated, if not an absence of community, at least a weaker sense of belonging:

"I'm a bit lost for words on that one.

"I don't know, I've just sort of floated through life being partly removed to a degree simply because [of] being the only Asians basically thrown into a backwater red-necked Australian community to a degree... not Bunbury." w2

The sense of 'just floating' was echoed by Erika who said she felt she was "kind of like floating through" and claimed it was because she was part Japanese and part Australian. (S3) Others described being confused: "In my culture you're either Armenian or you're not... So I've kind of pushed to the side because, you know, there's outside the 'culture', so I'm kind of on the border... [I'm a] bit confused". (S1) One participant from Sydney said that "I don't know what I am anymore". (S3) One Chatswood/Willoughby participant broadened this to claim that multiculturalism was marred by "confusion", while another asked: "what does it mean, what do they want from it?" (S2)

It is important to stress that this sense of social dislocation was not experienced purely, or even primarily, in ethnic terms. For some, their sense of local attachment was a negative. Erika argued that others made assumptions about her because she came from Bankstown (in contrast to an ethnic identity). (S3) The same feeling was echoed in the groups from Liverpool, and from Inala/Richlands. Natalie, however, felt pride in where she grew up precisely because it is so multicultural compared with other, more wealthy parts of Sydney.

"... I grew up in Fairfield and that's... actually the most multiculturally diverse city in Australia so I've grown up with everyone around me, so it doesn't really bother me. Whereas I had a friend who lives in Bronte [eastern Sydney] come to Fairfield and she was a bit shocked..." s5

The goal of social cohesion has always been fragile because of socio-economic inequalities and not just cultural diversity, yet multiculturalism is often blamed for what are really the effects of these inequalities.

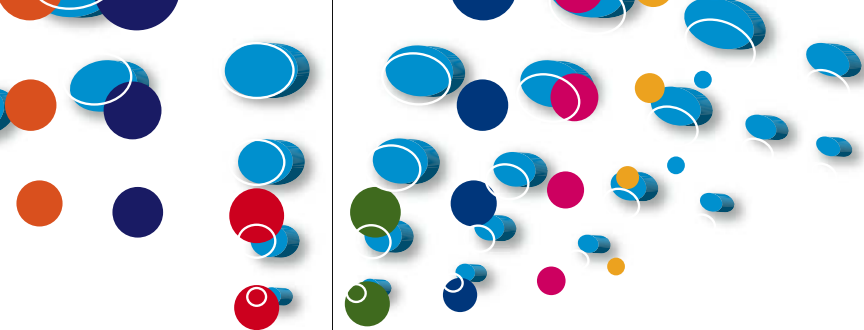
#### **"WE'RE ALL TRYING TO WORK OUT WHERE WE BELONG"**

In this context, what is often dubbed 'cultural maintenance' becomes significant. Conscious efforts to continue strong links to one's ethnic or national background aren't always constructed as an alternative to an attachment to Australia; rather, they are connected. Shu Chuan explained that the "morals and ethics" she had acquired from her "Chinese culture" were "pretty important for us, so I'd like to pass that on to the next generation". (W2) Natali, of German background, had also moved around a lot in Australia and New Zealand (she went to 16 high schools) and so her "trouble identifying with whether I'm more German than I am Australian" was as much to do with the complex settlement process she lived through than with any fundamental clash between cultures. Speaking German "opens up a whole different side" for her and she missed a strong sense of belonging which she felt she lost after migrating to Australia. But she realised hers was not a unique experience: "we're all in the same boat still trying to work out where we're at and where we belong". (W2)

**four.** There are many different ways of belonging in and to Australia.

**however...** These belongings may also cause confusion or division.

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Many felt a homeland belonging quite intensely. Tania said that “you’ll never take the All Blacks out of me, no matter how long I live here”. (S4) Others were less adamant. Natalia said she feels part of a community based on her background, but that this isn’t exclusive: “I just have some community, some people from Russia and some people from Australia, and for me it doesn’t matter”. (W2) For some, the balance was stronger one way than the other. Nu said he didn’t “entirely identify as being a Thai” but as a “new type of Australian even though a lot of the history I learnt was white Australia... I identify with the Australian community more than the Thai community”. This coexistence of belongings was echoed by Natali who described the joy of coming back to the land after being away – “the smell and the eucalyptus and all that, but culturally... I’m European”. She also said that she feels “at home” in Australia but “if you had raised it the other way, ‘Is [Australia] home?’, then I’d say no”. So while most of the participants identified themselves in terms of an ethnic group, to varying degrees of intensity, they didn’t only identify in terms of that group. When they do, it can often be fairly confused – some even voiced ethnic stereotypes about themselves. Marcus said that what pulls Swedish migrants together is “how they live and what we eat... we like wood a lot...”. (W1)

There were many responses which echoed the hybrid lives we described in *Living Diversity*, the ways in which increasing numbers of people have elements of their identity drawn from an array of cultural backgrounds. This produces a sense of hyphenation that characterises claims about mixed identities. Sometimes it was more complicated. Nu talked about his Italian friend, and how they spoke English, Italian and Thai together. (W2) Jack expressed this hybridity clearly, and described himself as “a mix”: “I was born in the Philippines but I’m not Filipino. I’m actually

Indian, and I’ve lived in Singapore, so I feel I’m all over the place.” (S1) As a result he didn’t see himself as Australian because he wasn’t attached to the “icons which are very much part of being Australian” – “sport” and “barbies”. Tamara described herself this way:

**“... born in South Africa but I’m Italian and Russian background, and I’m living here in Australia now, so for me I feel Australian but my background and my culture that I’ve been brought up with is very multicultural”.** <sup>S1</sup>

Another Sydneysider, Irene, said that she had “so many backgrounds” she couldn’t belong only to one: “I have Fijian, Samoan, Chinese, German, and my great-grandfather is an American”. (S3) Kylie from Carnarvon talked about her daughters being a mix of Norwegian, American, Japanese and English. (W3) Hybridity has become a common term to use when talking about the mixing that is often represented in the one human being, but it is often seen as a joining together of only two identities. These participants capture the multiple hybrid lives that are becoming common in Australian multiculturalism, but are rarely explored in discussions of diversity. This complex hybridity, of course, has implications for how we experience ourselves as part of a national community.

### **“HOW CAN I NOT BE CONSIDERED AUSTRALIAN?”**

These forms of cultural and social belonging produce ‘thin’ forms of community that are seen to characterise the age in which we live. They are often experienced as ‘problems’, but they are nevertheless forms of identification that younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds use to fashion meaningful, connected lives. This is the context in which attachments to the nation-state are articulated, because these forms of community are linked to a ‘cool’ sense

of citizenship (Turner and Rojek, 2001); an attachment to a national community that is ambivalent, wary of the dangers of excessive patriotism, and which embraces an ethic of care towards cultural differences. This coolness is born of increasing mobility and multiple networks of interconnectedness across social worlds, central to the cosmopolitanism of contemporary lifestyles.

These forms of communal belonging don't necessarily conflict with a sense of national community, despite current concerns over the patriotism of migrants or their respect for social conventions, especially those of Arabic background or Muslim faith. But it may weaken its centrality. The vast majority of the younger Australians in the focus groups confirmed that they felt Australia was "home", as we found in *Living Diversity*, even if they expressed some ambivalence. As one male in Brisbane said:

**"I feel more part of Australia. I mean, I am only me, but I work, I pay my taxes, and I've got a house and I do all my part, and I think we all do our part for sort of, for one big community... I just feel part of the greater community, as opposed to a little one in my street."** B3

The participants' definitions of what it means to be Australian reveal multilayered aspects of belonging with different modes of attachment and recognition. For some it was defined in terms of being born in Australia, having memories and experiences and friends and family here (Erika, S3) or having lived here for a number of years, being a citizen, or working here. Others saw it in straightforward terms of residency. Simon, of third-generation Dutch background, described an "Australian" as "a person who lives here". (B2) Jack, of first-generation Filipino background, said it was home because "this is where I make a living". (S1)

Some offered responses that related to symbolic or affective dimensions. Richard, of English background, claimed that it is really about a "state of mind".

**"I know people who call themselves Australian who weren't born here... but they get to a stage where they feel comfortable and they have an attitude of (a) Australia's home and (b) they relax... there's something about Australia they've come to associate themselves with."** B2

Jennifer, of first-generation Chinese background, for example, said "I feel very much at home" in Australia. (B2) Gillie, first-generation, Portuguese background, said, "I can only feel like [an Australian]". (W4) Describing national and ethnic belonging in terms of affect is, of course, quite common. Marcus would like to go back to Sweden at some stage because "it's just got this feel to it". (W1) Genete compared the feeling of her homeland, where "you know everybody. If something happens everyone comes to help" to the anonymity of Australian life: it is "hard" to get to know people, "they are not friendly". Lena also compared the friendliness of the people in Australia with the people in Italy who are more likely to invite you into their home. (B6) Sven felt at home in Australia because "it's a safe country". (B3) A Sydneysider hoped the future would bring "certainty". (S2) Intensity of belonging – or not – is linked to a sense of familiarity, security, safety, certainty (Bauman, 1999). This was often expressed in the focus groups in terms of the 'amount' or degree of being Australian. Jamie, who has Lebanese-Croatian parentage, spoke about others trying to make him choose what he was "more of". (S3) Nick argued that there were "degrees of Australian", citing the masculine example of being in a pub where they were talking about footy – "you feel a bit of an outsider". (B3)

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**however...** These belongings may also cause confusion or division.

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### **"IF ANYONE TRIES TO SAY I'M NOT, I START ARGUING"**

Being Australian was also defined by what we might call a sense of 'popular belonging' that reflects the idea of cool citizenship described above. Criticisms of the federal (and sometimes state) government and media organisations that many participants voiced, reflected a sense of commonality in opposition to key institutions of power. Cathy (S4) articulated this when she complained that nothing in the media "is really about us little people, it's just about the almighty dollar and it's about the big boys in parliament" (see Findings 6-7). Miguel took up this theme: "there's a common feeling that, you know, we have a lot of channels and magazines and obviously they are controlled by the same people". (S4) On the one hand this bound groups together, but it also undermined the sense of national leadership central to public politics. Yet this is not necessarily an expression of disempowerment, but a critical desire for engagement. Several participants in one of the Carnarvon groups went so far as to blame much of the contemporary experience of discrimination and conflict on governments in Australia; how they "manage" it, according to Salvatore and how they fail to recognise their "guilt" over how they have treated Indigenous people, according to Maria. (W4)

More importantly, not being Australian wasn't simply a choice of recalcitrant migrants, but was circumscribed by what others allowed you to be. As Ming said: "I feel Australian but other people don't see me as Australian – I think – because I'm Asian." (S6) Mai Anh echoed this: "it's not how you brand yourself but [how] other people brand you". (S5) Natalie also from Liverpool, was exasperated by not being considered Australian, an experience she has "all the time".

"If anyone tries to say I'm not I start arguing..."

"Well, they'll say, 'What nationality are you?'. And I'll go, 'I'm Australian'. And they'll go 'No you're not'. And I'm like, 'Yes I am, what are you talking about?'. They're like, 'What are your parents?'. I'll be like 'Maltese'. And they go, 'That makes you Maltese!'. I'm like, 'No it doesn't'. I was born at Fairfield Hospital for crying out loud..."

"... How can I not be considered Australian if I went to school, was born here, grew up here, learned the laws here, know the culture here, pay my taxes here? How can that not be considered Australian?" <sup>55</sup>

While some participants saw multiculturalism in terms of an openness to difference, some, as we saw earlier, worried about the threat of separatism, which has consequences for social cohesion. Osama complained that "multiculturalism is not happening" because some communities, like the Chinese and Lebanese, were "living in their own groups". (S4) Josephine complained of "ghettos" in Sydney: "every suburb is one culture". (S3) But others in the same group, like Erika, thought that this was a stereotypical perception. (S3) Tim believed that living in such groups was a "function of security", a desire to be safe, which was understandable and "over time that will dissipate". (S4) Richard felt there had been a loss of community in Australia over the past 20 years as a consequence. (B2)

This again produces a cool national belonging: while many enthusiastically described Australia as home, and as a great country, there was no chest-thumping patriotism. Indeed, one Sydney participant, talked about how Australians of Italian background became "Italian" during the Olympics, and remarked that "the whole society is not very Australian". (S4)





This comment reminds us that, far from being absolute and ongoing, a sense of belonging is fundamentally relational, depending on context and situation. This sense of situated belonging was shown when Natali was asked if she would call herself Australian:

"It depends who asks me... Like when I'm travelling I'll always say I'm Australian... When there's other Germans I'll speak German. With my close friends... they know that I associate a bit more with being German." <sup>W2</sup>

Siti, in contrast, felt more Malay in Australia, but more Australian in Malaysia, because "they think of me as an Aussie". (W1) Alisa, of German and Welsh background, said she would be in the "middle" if she had to describe where she was located on a scale between her cultural background and Australian-ness, but then added: it "depends where you are really". (W1) Josephine talked about being "out of place" when she visited an Aboriginal community. (S3)

One young respondent in Inala/Richlands talked about how this could shift from group to group – they were "sometimes" Australian depending on who they "hang around with", and this could relate to a question of how their "accent" was received and if they were "acting like them". (B1) This idea of "acting" appropriately in a given context was echoed by others who talked about their accents changing depending on who they were with. Salvatore said that "when the yobbo comes out and all that drinking and carrying on... I don't feel Aussie". (W4)

Belonging was also situated in terms of one's life's course. Nu indicated that community is not a fixed relation but an ongoing process of alignment and realignment, particularly around key experiences such as moving and having children.

"I was part of the community but as you grow older you move on and I think that's probably why I'm lost for words... 'cause, I mean, I suppose when we were younger... I used to... go to a monastery and be part of that community and sort of have a part of an identity there. But as you grow older you sort of find other interests and then people get married and have kids and they all sort of go their own separate ways. So, yeah, to a degree you gotta... find where you fit in into the community and at this stage I don't know where I fit in...

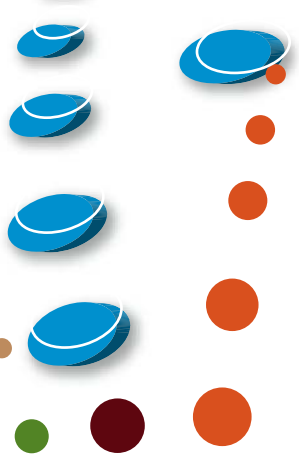
"I think [having children] would be the biggest one, simply because when people have children their perceptions of how they should conduct themselves... and they become more aware of a community and how their children would like to grow up... and what type of community that they want their children to grow up in... and become more involved in community activities." <sup>W2</sup>

These insights into forms of belonging might be seen to pose the threat of social *division*, especially in relation to ethnic or racial identities. Certainly there are tensions between belonging and inclusion which the focus groups explored.

**four.** There are many different ways of belonging in and to Australia.

**however...**  
These belongings may also cause confusion or division.

**five.** Forms of exclusion and discrimination undermine senses of belonging.  
**however...**  
Cultural differences are generally managed with 'practical tolerance'.



## five.

### Forms of exclusion and discrimination undermine senses of belonging.

#### UNBELONGING AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Not all focus group participants felt a strong sense of belonging within Australia, as we have seen. Earlier in this report (Finding 3) we examined this in terms of discrimination, intolerance and 'racism'. Yet there is also a wider sense in which exclusion is experienced by those with a migrant background. Many of the participants described how they didn't feel a strong sense of welcome. Natali, of German-Welsh background, spoke of a sense of distance that she felt:

**"In Australia people are very friendly on first meeting them, but then it never quite goes below the surface... It takes a long time to get to know people and even then, though they're friendly at first, to sort of get beyond that, just to, you know, beyond knowing somebody as to say hello and really get to know them personally, developing a relationship with them..."** W2

An, of Vietnamese-Chinese background, compared Australia to Asia, where people "walk the streets" and say hi to the neighbours, but in Australia they meet in organised events such as going to church, but don't know "what John and Bob next door does". (S6) For some, this feeling of unbelonging was even stronger. Marcus, of Swedish background, talked about how "I don't act too Australian" – drinking, partying, surfing – and felt the effects. (W1) Similarly, Nu said you have to adapt quickly to survive. (W2)

This sense of exclusion worked both ways. Sharon and Mardi felt excluded "in their own community" when people were talking Vietnamese. (B2) Jennifer felt less Australian because she can be surrounded by people who don't speak English: "I know I'm in Australia but I don't feel Australian at the moment because I can't understand what they're saying". (B2) Sharon likewise referred to being taken out of her "comfort zone". Here, the linguistic intolerance referred to in Finding 2 relates to a sense of insecurity. Yet this wasn't true of all places. Sharon said she doesn't feel uncomfortable in Chinatown: "it's probably the only place that I don't, because I expect to go there and find China". This may arise because of expectations, or because, as a tourist site, the 'China' she experiences is very much designed for Westerners.

Several in the Inala/Richlands 16-20 year-old group (B1) also spoke of feeling "intimidated" when some groups spoke their own language when they were, for example, being served in a shop. Remembering that the participants are also from non-English speaking backgrounds, it is significant that they share a dominant Anglo-Australian view that such use of the 'mother tongue' equates with being "arrogant" and "disrespectful to our culture". (B1) Another participant in this group talked about how one area – Waterford – was much less racist than Inala because Waterford is "mainly full of white people", and "Inala is full of Asians, Samoans, Aborigines, and that's what really messes things up". (B1) This sense of discomfort being caused by those of migrant backgrounds is a story usually told by long-time Australians.



The Bunbury 16-20 year old group spoke in terms of 'comfort'. Some felt "comfortable" in Australia, while one or two didn't, or said they felt more "comfortable" in their homeland because, as Siti said, "like the cultural, like, it's everywhere there, instead of here it's only like a small amount". (W1) Georgina, a second-generation Australian of Malaysian background, when asked if Australia was 'home' said "yes and no" and blamed experiences of exclusion for her ambivalence: "only because I was made to feel so different when I was little". (W1) This can even work within a group. For example, Jennifer refused to speak Cantonese with her boyfriend's Malaysian-Chinese friends because she felt more "Westernised". She saw it as their "bonding thing" but she regarded it as "a wall" where "I feel I'm the outside even though I know I'm Chinese". (B2) It can also work in relation to your own ethnic group. One of the participants in Inala/Richlands complained about those moments when her South African friends and family started "ragging Australia", and said: "you don't feel very secure anymore about where you live". (B1)

This sense of being uncomfortable in Australian society betrays a more profound understanding of the sense of dissolution in national and social belonging, and can relate to daily experiences on the street, at work, in shopping centres and schools (Noble, 2005). These kinds of experiences require enormous work on the part of Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds in their everyday lives; work that attempts to overcome unhelpful senses of difference.

# however...

Cultural differences are generally managed with 'practical tolerance'.

## THE WORK OF PRACTICAL TOLERANCE

We suggested earlier that many focus group participants generally moved happily between different social domains. Yet living in a culturally and socially complex society – one that is marked by the multiple spheres of social participation as well as cultural diversity that increasingly typify globalised capitalism – requires enormous effort both to create a sense of belonging and to cross-over the differences which those forms of belonging bring in to play. Belonging in a community is not just some abstract attachment to an idea of identity, but requires the hard work of forging connections. For example, Grace (W2) described the kind of "supporting" work her church did, which she saw as central to multiculturalism. Lotte also articulated this well.

**"I'm quite involved with the community in Bunbury... 'cause I work for the Volunteer Centre and they work with community groups and organisations so I'm all the time involved with the local community."** w2

Yet she questioned whether "I really feel that I belong to them [and] identify with them". Richard said that community "becomes a choice whether you become active or not"; while Simon commented, "I don't feel like a part of the community, but I feel safe... I don't get involved". (B2) Kylie argued that you feel part of a community when "people ask you to help", and when, "if you need help with anything", others will come to your aid. (W3)

**four.** There are many different ways of belonging in and to Australia.

**however...** These belongings may also cause confusion or division.

**five.** Forms of exclusion and discrimination undermine senses of belonging.

**however...** Cultural differences are generally managed with 'practical tolerance'.

Sharon from Inala/Richlands talked positively about how “a lot of religions are trying to work in with other religions, they’re trying to be sort of multicultural, multi-religious – they’re trying to blend without trying to take people’s culture... To me that’s really difficult, but that’s the hard part”. (B2) She gave as an example a local school which embraced a multicultural ethos: they had recently visited a Buddhist temple. In other words, the desire to practice forms of cultural maintenance sits alongside forms of social adaptation and integration, as we suggested in *Living Diversity*, and which is also clear in Findings 2-3 of this report.

These practices of connection don’t have to be formalised by institutions such as schools and churches, they can emerge from leisure practices. Marcus recounted the new “Aussie friends” he had made through clubbing. He described how he “adapted” to fit in: “you still act your culture but you try and just pick up little things all the time that may make you popular”. (W1) Miguel thought that the second generation “tend to spread out and mix with the other, like for instance, marry someone from a different background”. (S4) The kinds of reciprocity described by Kylie and other participants mark a multiculturalism of interaction, not one of co-habitation where different groups simply lived alongside one another (Hage, 2005). However, these forms of reciprocity weren’t always available to all.

In contrast to those who complained of division and separateness – and even despite the experiences of discrimination, ignorance and misunderstanding – there were some who felt this diversity produced a sense of belonging across cultures, where the ‘people mixing’ itself created a sense of attachment. Jennifer, of Chinese background, spoke of how she really enjoys people who are “willing to get to know you and want to know more about you... knowing about your customs and that kind of thing”. (B2) She liked the fact that Chinese New Year had become such a big thing for other cultures. “I just think, wow, people really want to know about this stuff and it’s great, I feel really part of it.” She contrasted this to some of the name-calling she got when she first arrived.

A Sydney participant said that what was shared was that “we’re all immigrants”. (S4) Chris captured this when he compared Australia to England: “I think there is a unique Australian culture but it’s very diverse”. (B2) In the same group, one respondent tellingly talks about how “we” are “more multicultural”; Australians are “more mixing”. Khrystine, second-generation Australian of Maltese-Egyptian parentage, listed the various contributions from different countries, then said “we’ve merged everything into this massive ball that we call our own culture”. (W1) Ming, of Taiwanese background, claimed that a Muslim woman wearing a hijab was “being more Australian

“We don’t have to bring people in and say, you know, ‘be Australian’ and get rid of their free will to let them believe their own religion and [live] their own life.”

*Okay so it’s a bit of a conundrum?*

“Yeah well it’s a catch-22 really.”

**Matthew, 16, third-generation, Malaysian-Aboriginal, Broome ws**

– so Australia is one of the few countries that you can walk around wearing that and not feel un-Australian”. (S6) This led to an interesting debate in one of the Chatswood/Willoughby groups between one participant who described this complexity as “confusion”, and another who asked: “So what is this culture, what is Australia? Is it this or is it that or is it that?” Another respondent argued that it was the mixture itself which defined Australia.

**“But Australia is all of it – we are, and all our backgrounds, make up Australia and Australia is what it is because of the amount of different cultures that have come to the country and our families and those backgrounds are what make the country now what it is...”** <sup>52</sup>

### **“AUSTRALIA HAS OPENED UP A LOT MORE”**

For some, this meant asserting a basic humanism, which included all people: “it all basically comes down to we’re all human beings... this country that we live in is made of many different people”. (B2) A Sydney respondent claimed that what we had in common was “the fact that we’re human beings”. (S4) This echoes the idea of a global ecumene, a bringing together of many cultures (Hannerz, 1992: 217). As Salvatore (W4) said “we’re all part of the one world, you know”.

This extended to a claim about the emerging cosmopolitanism of Australia, despite the various incidents of exclusion. “I think Australia has opened a lot more, it’s more aware of what goes on in the world”. (Mark, S4) This, as we saw in Finding 3, is commonly said in support of Australian multiculturalism. For Nick, it meant he had come to “consider the world my home”. (B3) Sven shared this desire to be “mobile”: Australia was “home for now”, but maybe not forever. (B3) This cosmopolitanism is not the cosmopolitanism of taste usually

associated with elites, but the openness to difference forged through time and effort in the contours of everyday life.

This everyday cosmopolitanism is not an unproblematic moral virtue, but a form of ‘practical tolerance’ whereby difference gets negotiated and managed in everyday life. Nu gave this pragmatic sense of just having to get along: after describing Australia’s history of intolerance towards migrants, he said “there’s a few Muslims in Bunbury so you can’t really be intolerant; that’s a good thing about being [here]”. (W2) Despite the recounting of ignorance and discrimination in Broome, there was still a sense that “... we have grown up with the fact that there is this multiculturalism in this town and we just got over [it]”. (W5)

This form of getting along is not that form of tolerance which masks relations of power (Hage, 1998:79); it is rather the practices of negotiation which make it possible for differences to exist interactively, not in conflict. It is a form of local management of diversity that people undertake on a daily basis. It doesn’t preclude the intolerance outlined earlier in this report, but it does work to find ways of getting around it.

Just as many of the participants saw the second generation as heralding a better way of approaching cultural diversity, many also saw the kinds of practical tolerance exhibited by their own children. Tania, who elsewhere saw attachment to groups as being part of human nature, also described the way her son has made friends with Muslim kids and black kids: “everybody comes home and he knows there are differences but he openly will ask me about them and he’s happy to accept the answers”. (S4) She was so outraged by a story on *60 Minutes* that she thought “trashed the Muslims” that she and another mother decided to write a letter to the program and they then:

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"... formed a group of like-minded women from completely different cultural backgrounds – we're not doing a great deal other than getting together and having a cup of tea and talking about our concerns for our children".<sup>54</sup>

Irene, with her mix of Islander, Asian, American and European backgrounds, said it meant that "we just get along with different types of people" and she tried to avoid "that cultural thing" of sticking in one group. (S3)

Ducy expressed this sense of practical tolerance in an anecdote about when he first came to Australia from Vietnam, and a teacher "automatically took me as a stereotype" and assumed his family would cook with a "bamboo pot" because he was Asian. "I knew it was a kind of racist remark" and it made him feel "un-Australian", "but I didn't take it to heart because she didn't mean it". (B1) Several hoped that this sense of just getting on would prove beneficial in the future. Several participants in one of the Carnarvon groups expressed the need to "say sorry" to the Indigenous inhabitants so we could all "go on as one". (Gillie, W4)

## Considerations

Two key issues emerge from the focus groups: the multiple belongings citizens experience in a culturally complex society like Australia, and the forms of practical tolerance they produce – alongside experiences of racism, discrimination, ignorance and conflict – in managing this complexity.

Stressing the negotiated nature of practical tolerance is important because it avoids the apparent paradox of Australia as being both a tolerant and racist country: Australians are tolerant because they are negotiating the cultural tensions of everyday life as well as enjoying the benefits of diversity. Once we recognise this, we can avoid the simplistic judgements of multiculturalism as good or bad.

The sense of multiple belongings has significance for media because it shows that cultural identity and social belonging are not always defined primarily in terms of ethnicity or nation. Contemporary societies are much more complex and multilayered. This has particular consequences for considering the emerging patterns of media, to which we now turn.

"So get your neighbours well, open up dialogue, talk to people, not just your group, but different people as well... that's the way you get people together to be more tolerant and you learn more from the others as well. And that means people are not afraid of you, be more open and friendly to people and it's more peaceful..."

Thay, 26-30, second-generation, Thai-Chinese, Inala/Richlands B3



# YOUNGER PEOPLE AS CITIZEN AUDIENCES

## Introduction

This section explores how younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds use popular mass media and other communication technologies, such as interpersonal media, in their daily lives.

In *Living Diversity* we rejected the presumption that there are two blocks of media consumers, 'mainstream' and 'ethnic'. Instead, we found many commonalities in the way the 'mainstream' and Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds use media. We observed generational differences in their media habits that demonstrated that generation, more than linguistic or cultural background, predicted media use. Our research introduced additional questions about the nature of the Australian media audience. We explore these questions in this study.

Definitions of 'audience' are being reformulated as the profusion of new media make available novel ways to engage with the public sphere. Indeed, social engagement through new media delivers the prospect of audiences becoming more engaged in public affairs, leading to the formulation of the 'citizen audience'. This audience may use blogs and forums, for example, to engage with social policy and issues.

Racial conflicts among younger Australians in Cronulla, Sydney, in early December 2005 were coordinated, in part, by the use of SMS messages ('Police consider SMS Cronulla message "a crime"', 2005). These messages incited confrontation by encouraging participants to rally at the beach location where the violence took place. Similar messages were sent days later to mobile phones on the Gold Coast in Queensland. While those events suggest cultural differences between and among younger Australians, remarks made about media in the focus groups suggest that attitudes about media among younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds are more alike than different.

Younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds enthusiastically adopt and appropriate media within a wide range of personal and community constraints. More kinds of media technologies are used among younger than among older audiences and there is a clear preference for electronic and interpersonal communication devices among the youngest. Appendix 1 presents findings of media use based on a survey of the focus group participants conducted prior to each session. In general, the 'older' participants have retained more selective, more segregated and more traditional media habits. Their attitudes toward these media, as described in these findings, explain why.

**six.** Younger Australians have a strong sense of connection with particular media.

**however...**

There is often distrust and disconnection associated with media content.

**seven.** Younger Australians believe they are more capable of filtering information than previous generations.

**however...**

Younger Australians feel media do not empower them to 'make change' on important issues.



## six.

### Younger Australians have a strong sense of connection with particular media.

#### GENERATIONAL CHANGE

Discussions of how media were used were very clearly split according to age differences. Younger participants (those under the age of 30) were more likely to talk about the media as sources of entertainment, and newer media such as the Internet and mobile phones as tools for communication, while older participants tended to see all media primarily as sources of information. For example, a participant in the Strathfield/Burwood/Ashfield group of 36-40 year-olds said media were important in his life because they "[k]eep me up to date with what's happening in the community plus international news, what's happening all over the world, good or bad, I like to keep myself informed with what's happening globally...". (S4) This is contrasted with the following comment made by a participant in the 26-30 year-old Bunbury group, who argued the main function of their media use was: "Probably [to] provide escapism to some extent. You know, you can lose yourself in the conversation with a friend on email or chat or whatever...". (W2)

Very clear differences were also found in the ways in which participants spoke about different media. Entertainment genres such as soaps or sitcoms, technologies such as SMS, and communicating with friends on the Internet, were discussed positively and enthusiastically. However, participants tended to speak about news and current affairs with a 'seriousness' that clearly demonstrated they considered this type of media to be distinctly different from entertainment genres. The focus groups conformed to other findings that

news, current affairs and information is largely described in terms of its potential for informing citizens, while entertainment is largely described in terms of its ability to provide personal satisfaction and facilitate social interaction (Dahlgren 1988; Buckingham 2000).

#### MEDIA ARE "JUST RIGHT THERE"

Based on the focus group discussions around the questions, 'What media couldn't you live without?' and 'What do these media do for you?', attitudes toward media were generally positive. All age groups spoke enthusiastically about their media use, with Naomi describing it as offering "a portal to the whole world". (B5) The vast majority of respondents said they would be unable to live without some form of media and few argued against this idea. There was an acceptance of and comfort with the fact that media are integral to daily life and fit seamlessly into varied routines and activities. People had become "so used to this technology and so used to having all the forms of technology around you, either music, radio, whatever, that if you sit in silence it's sort of weird...". (B5) Comments from other participants also demonstrated how integral the media are to the rhythms of everyday life:

An: "Like if you'd asked me five years ago I wouldn't have said the mobile. But now if I leave the house without it I feel as though... I don't have my wallet or my keys with me." s6

Kylie: "Yeah, [the Internet] keeps me in contact, 'cause... I'm from New Zealand, so and it's just instant... you just type a message and there's no effort, it's just right there. You don't need to post it..." w3

Nick's (B3) belief that TV was a "very habit forming drug" and should be avoided and that "you can get sucked into spending a lot of time on the Internet...", as well as Joy's (S6) claim that having a TV in her bedroom had

made her “lazy” by distracting her from other activities, stood out because they were atypical responses.

Indeed, when asked what media they couldn’t live without, most participants weren’t satisfied with a single medium response. Instead, they tended to say something like, “television... television and the Internet” or “the Internet and my mobile”.

### **BROADCAST MEDIA ARE “EVERYWHERE YOU GO”**

Television was most frequently mentioned as the medium respondents couldn’t live without. For most, television was valued because it is relaxing and entertaining. It was also a preferred source of news (see Findings 8-9) and sport. Sonia said, “I use it as a tool just to sort of switch off, unwind, meditate a little bit”. (S2) Paul said, “I’m an at-home dad. I guess the main thing I really need is news, world news. I don’t think I could live without finding out what’s going on... [via] television and radio”. (B4) “TV, because I love sport, any sport,” said Simon. (B2) Television was also a connection to a wider world for many participants. Tamara said, “I’m a new-time mum so it’s the only interaction I get with the outside world at the moment, so I watch a lot of TV”. (S1) Similarly, Simone said that since she’s had children she doesn’t “go out” as much and her “downtime” is spent with television instead. (S2)

One-fifth of the focus group participants mentioned they couldn’t live without radio and half of these were in the oldest age band. Radio ranked third among preferred media. Gillie said he preferred radio because “it’s everywhere you go”. (W4) Radio was seen as portable and practical by those who mentioned it, and they cited examples such as listening while working, driving or engaged in domestic duties. Tina said:

“I listen to the radio because I’m usually in the car by myself, driving to work, so it’s nice just to get the news. I don’t have time to get the news at home so it’s my own time.” S1

### **DIGITAL MEDIA “GIVES ME ACCESS TO EVERYTHING”**

The Internet was second to television as the one medium participants couldn’t live without and the one with the most consistent ‘perceived dependency’ across age groups. Douglas, late 30s, a third-generation Australian with a German background, said: “The media I don’t think I could live without would be the Internet. The reason being is the Internet gives me access to everything”. (S2)

While use of Internet services such as entertainment, search engines and email were high and consistent across the age groups, use of the Internet for accessing the news (discussed more in Findings 8-9), was much lower. The big differences by age group occur with online computer games and message or expressive services including blogs, instant messaging, downloading and creating content. The younger the participant, the more likely they are to use these technologies.

For example, Jasmin said, “I couldn’t live without music... I download it... I don’t really listen to the radio... I’ve got an iPod”. (B1) Natalie said she preferred the Internet over other media because “you can pretty much find anything you like”. (S5)

Interacting with others was an important reason the participants preferred the Internet. Ben said, “I couldn’t live without the Internet, because I’m always chatting and everything, I’m always on the Internet... ninemsn... daily... 24/7”. (S3) Email, too, was mentioned as a medium that people couldn’t live without. Thay used the Internet for “email and to keep contact”. (B3) Siti said she couldn’t live without

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the Internet because, "I'm always emailing people and I like to keep in contact with all my friends and family". (W1) Tracey said:

"The one thing I could not live without is my email, Probably because a lot of my friends and family are all really busy and it's much easier to keep in touch with them. We play phone-tag all the time, so email is so much easier. And I've got a lot of family overseas too and with time differences and that, it's heaps easier on the email." B4

#### **PRINT MEDIA "MIGHT BE OLD-FASHIONED"**

The print media were infrequently mentioned in the focus groups as indispensable. Newspapers started to get mentioned with the 26-30 year-olds. They got more mentions among the oldest groups. When newspapers were mentioned, the form rather than the content seemed to drive their use. For example, Jack (S1) said he couldn't live without newspapers which he could read on the train because at home, where his family demanded his attention, there was no opportunity for his media preferences. Similarly, Hazel said she preferred newspapers and magazines because, "You could be in a secluded area or an isolated area but still, you know, in any country and still be able to find out what's going on". (W6) Michael said:

"The media I can't live without, it might be old-fashioned, but printed media. So newspapers and magazines. I was involved with publishing ages ago so I still have this sort of thing, even to the point of obsession, collecting things and reading them... piles and piles of things..." S2

Kerri Jane said she preferred newspapers because she had a bias for print. "I was just always brought up to believe in literature". (W3) Saba, first-generation, Syrian background, said:

"I'm surprised not many people have mentioned... the newspaper. I get it home-delivered each day... I read it on the way to work on the train, so I catch up on all the news that's happened. On the way home, another one that's just come out in Sydney is the *MX* newspaper, which they have on the trains..." S4

Marion said she didn't like magazines because, "you get magazines and you get frustrated and angry with [them] because they don't tell the truth". (B6) (See Finding 8.) By comparison, books are seen as less accessible than online media. Ritika said: "I do a lot of research for uni and I really can't be bothered going and looking through the books, so Internet would be one for that, and also for information." (S3) Nevertheless, books and magazines were mentioned as an indispensable medium by a few people over 25 years of age.

#### **HOME ENTERTAINMENT TECHNOLOGY DIFFERENTIATES OLD FROM NEW**

Most participants said that they used home entertainment technologies like DVDs for relaxation. Donna (B3) said she used DVDs for the movies she could access. Participants also pointed out that entertainment technologies make their generation different from their parents, both in terms of availability and rapid turnover. Sharon said her parents couldn't work most new entertainment technologies while her daughter, "can't believe that... she's like, 'DVDs are new Mum?'". (B2) Few, however, suggested they couldn't live without these additions to television.



## MOBILE MEDIA MEAN "I'M ALWAYS IN CONTACT"

The mobile phone ranked fourth for younger Australians in our study as a medium they couldn't live without. Jamie said, "I can't live without a phone, I'm always in contact... voice and text... I vary between the two." (S3) Jermyn expressed a common feeling of loss without a phone:

"I just couldn't live without contact. There were times when I lost my phone or my phone ran out of battery and I felt like I was just... it's as if I'm out of the world." s3

Females, more than males, and younger more than older participants, tended to nominate the mobile as a preferred medium. Ming (S6) preferred her phone because she "can do everything on the mobile" including surf the Internet. Jennifer relied on her mobile as a master phone book to ensure she "can get in touch with people". (B2) The mobile was repeatedly discussed as a critical tool for social contact. Naomi (B5), a year 12 student and second-generation Malaysian-Australian said she depended on it socially. Alisa, a student and first-generation Australian from a German and a Welsh background said, "I have so many friends that I just like to keep in contact with." (W1)

As discussion in the focus groups moved from entertainment and mass media to digital, interactive and interpersonal media, then back to content-based entertainment and information, the tension between these two general classes of media became clear. What emerged was a paradox caused by the simultaneous reliance on a wide range of media and 'disconnects' between mass and interpersonal media functions, if not uses. The paradox revealed why many of these younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds had moved from print media, in particular, to

digital media and why younger audiences were less likely to nominate traditional broadcasting and more likely to mention digital media as their source of information and entertainment.

**however...**  
There is often distrust and disconnection associated with media content.

A common thread in the focus group discussions about what media did for them and how these media contributed to their lives, led participants to reveal their insecurities about and frustrations with the complex media landscape. Among the themes that emerged were lack of authenticity, sincerity and veracity of the perspectives they were getting, and concern about an incomplete sense of belonging where their hybrid lives were further variegated by media half-truths. These themes were expressed not only for news and current affairs – normally identified with these concerns (cf., Brand, Archibold & Rane, 2001) – but also for entertainment media and general popular culture. Criticism was levelled primarily at large mass media organisations and in relation to traditional mass media. By contrast, participants exuded confidence and loyalty for interpersonal and networking media such as mobile phones, text messaging and email.

Despite their enthusiastic use of computer media, many feared both their dependency on the technology and the implications of its use for their own identity. Markham said:

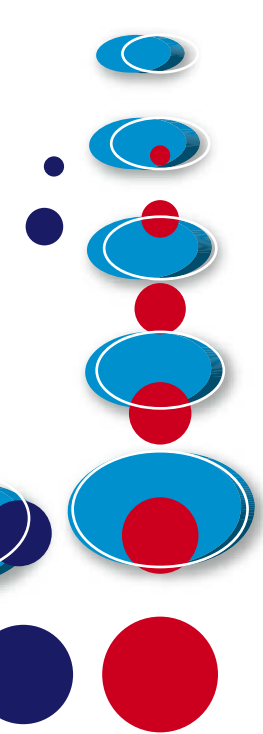
"I'm always on the Internet, for work, for maybe, you know it's... embarrassing... I'd hate to classify myself as a computer nerd, but I'm on there last thing before I go to bed, first thing when I wake up in the morning." w3

**six.** Younger Australians have a strong sense of connection with particular media.

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Younger Australians feel media do not empower them to 'make change' on important issues.



Others demonstrated the complex relationship they have with media. They depend on it and yet distrust it. Michael said:

"I use [the media] for everything, for entertainment and information. How do they make me feel? I don't know, some of them, especially printed media, I just love, sometimes just the whole package. I've never been a designer but I love the way, what's written, the way it's there, the way it looks, the photography and everything like that... But sometimes, I mean, I'm very, very sceptical generally of media and information, extremely. I pretty much don't believe anything. When I say don't believe, I tend to say I need that confirmed or whatever, but I generally believe that any media is pushing a particular sort of point or a viewpoint and I need to see something before I believe anything in any media..." <sup>S2</sup>

Many claimed that the 'business' of media detracted from the quality or impartiality of media content. Cathy said media are, "more advertising, everything's about advertising, everything's marketing and advertising". (S4) Trevor said media, "isn't like a community service... it's a business". (B6)

Distrust of the mass media generally was evident in comments that arose about feedback to magazines and television stations. Duce said:

"One time I emailed *60 Minutes*... about a program they showed [on] Agent Orange... in our war... it was sprayed over Vietnam. I just gave feedback, asked them if they could be more informative next time [because] they weren't in-depth enough." <sup>B1</sup>

Duce said he never received a response and would never again give feedback to the media, "I'd be wasting my time." Another participant told of her experience with engaging with major media. She emailed a teen magazine with a complaint about a story. She received a reply stating that if she didn't like its content, not to purchase the magazine. Glenda demonstrated that newer media haven't helped audiences communicate with major media operators:

"Even on email if I contacted them, like my mother-in-law is famous for writing letters to every media she can... The response she has generally got back, is 'Thank you very much for your letter, it has been received'. And I'm sure her letter's been torn up and thrown in the bin. I suppose I will look at the TV and I go: 'Oh yes, I'm sure that is influencing a lot of people about what they're saying, but honestly I think you're just talking a lot of rubbish'." <sup>B6</sup>

### **"YOU CAN PLACE YOURSELF IN THE WORLD"**

The younger Australians in our groups seem to be searching for meaning in their mainstream media, but say they have trouble finding it. Rather than finding a sense of place, they feel a dysfunctional dependence on what little connection media, particularly news media (see Findings 8-9), give them for a sense of belonging, and then seek to tune out with entertainment for relaxation and escapism.

The recent fascination with reality-based entertainment seems to be based on its apparent or perceived authenticity. 'Genuine' characters and 'real' people are part of the attraction of reality-based television for participants in this study. While some said they liked traditional media for the celebrity culture it offers, others rejected this as insincere and contrived. For them, 'reality TV' was preferable,

as Joshua – second-generation, Maltese background – said when discussion turned to *Big Brother*, “they’re just normal people and then they go to a big house for a while and then they get out; now they’re famous for about a year or two and then they are back to normal”. (B5)

Jackie referred to a controversy about reality TV programs when speaking about the choices audiences had as consumers.

**“We don’t have to watch, a TV program that’s offending... you just turn it off or change it... With all the disaster things, if there’s just too much on, and it’s on my channel I’ll quickly change to another channel if I’ve had enough. So I’m exercising my rights that way... when *Big Brother* was on, and people [were] complaining about how it was so rude... it’s like ‘Why are you watching it?’”** B6

The role of the most popular medium, television, is that it offers escape from reality, relaxation and sometimes, excitement and connection to the larger society. However, for connection, younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds feel newer media are offering more than traditional media can. One 26-30 year-old in Bunbury said:

**“You know you can lose yourself in the conversation with a friend on email or chat or whatever and yeah, sort of you can place yourself in the world rather than, you know, you live your own day-to-day life but you can see where you fit in the bigger picture.”** W2

There is a growing sense that younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds need to depend on friends and relatives here and in other places around the world to corroborate the ‘reality’ constructed by mainstream media (see Finding 9) and to feel a part of a community. This finding is particularly

true for the youngest of the three age bands in this study for which SMS, voice mobile, email and online chat are seamless parts of the social fabric to which they belong.

However, even growing reliance on interpersonal channels and new technologies was treated with caution, albeit of a different kind. Indeed, discussions about newer media use, if not dependency, provoked occasional comments about the contrast between media and non-media leisure. Comments of this nature seemed to be framed in terms of modest fears and concerns. These were expressed in terms of scripts about using media inside instead of taking advantage of the ‘healthy’ sport and leisure that ‘should’ be part of Australian life. One female said about the generation following her:

**“I’m scared for them, because when my mum grew up, like parents didn’t worry about where their kids were; kids went out, they got dirty, they played, they came home. When I was little we still got to go out and play... But now kids go home, they’ve all got TV, video games, everything. Like... most kids come home and sit in front of the TV, they don’t... play outside. And I’m scared because as our technology is advancing kids aren’t going to get to experience any of that, they’re not going to be able... to ride bikes with their friends in the afternoon. Because society is becoming so much more restricted because there is crime, people always have to know where their kids are, always have to be on an arm’s length. You can’t just go out and say ‘Hey mum I’ll be home before dark’, And like even when I was little, we used to be like ‘Be back before five’... I don’t think they’re going to have a chance to do that.”** B1

**six.** Younger Australians have a strong sense of connection with particular media.

**however...** There is often distrust and disconnection associated with media content.

**seven.** Younger Australians believe they are more capable of filtering information than previous generations.  
**however...** Younger Australians feel media do not empower them to ‘make change’ on important issues.

## seven.

### Younger Australians believe they are more capable of filtering information than previous generations.

Younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds are deeply aware of the obvious change in available technologies compared with their parents' generation. They readily identify the shift from a simple and contained landscape of media in past generations, to the many media tools available to their own generation. The most meaningful change they identified, however, was the shift from the mass communication functions of media to the mixed functions enjoyed by the rise of interpersonal communication technologies. They compared themselves to their parents in terms of being more 'networked' and less reliant on large media corporations for their entertainment and information. Moreover, they highlighted the speed of change and technology adoption as their generation's *Zeitgeist*.

Jermyn (18): "I remember my mum she always used to ask me 'Why is your mobile phone bill so high? Why are you on it all the time?'... I don't know, I just feel they kind of [don't] understand, like perhaps it's just our generation, it's just the thing. They're more used to the traditional methods..." <sup>S3</sup>

Irene (19): "They don't need to keep up with their friends, they don't need to talk to them every day. They just have each other and when they watch TV it's like the Discovery channel or the news. It's not like a means of entertainment. And with stuff like newspapers and magazines it's just for news. I watch it for, like, entertainment." <sup>S3</sup>

Erika, 17: "I don't think they realise that that's how we network and that's how we keep in touch with our friends and we do it like on a daily basis, like we keep really in touch with our friends, but like I've noticed with my parents they'll only keep in touch weekly or so with their friends..." <sup>S3</sup>

Many participants, whose parents migrated to Australia, recounted their parents' descriptions of a very different media experience:

Ducy, 18: "Media pretty much had nothing to do with my parents because back then they lived in Vietnam and they migrated here when I was only a couple of months, so they never relied on such things when they were growing up." <sup>B1</sup>

Instead, Ducy's parents relied on the close-knit and geographically isolated community where trust, safety and face-to-face communication appeared abundant.

Siti, 17: "Because my parents, like they're from Malaysia and like they lived in a very traditional village and it was practically like in a jungle so they kind of practically had nothing so yeah... I have the Internet, the phone and all that." <sup>W1</sup>

#### "IT'S EVERYWHERE NOW"

Lena, in her late 30s and a first-generation Australian from Russia retold her parents' story:

"... they couldn't rely on media to deliver the truth. So when we were in Russia... we were White Russians, you know, very anti-Communist. So I remember through childhood my father listening to the radio, because Americans had, in Russian language, on one particular station, a program for about an hour a day... but Russians would try to block it, so you could barely hear it; and I remember this picture of my father, his ear was always to

the radio, because the Russians were trying to block it. [And] in our newspapers, they would write that 'We just had terrific summer, and we have so much wheat'... and all of a sudden he hears from American station that Russians had actually problems with wheat and they are buying from US. And also because it was ongoing war in Middle East, and American propaganda was very pro-Israeli and Russian propaganda was very pro-Arabic... [And] at the end of the day you would have to think who is getting you the truth." B6

The media in their parents' day was a "luxury" whereas it is seen by the younger Australians in the focus groups as a necessity for their work and family roles. One Sydney participant said the media landscape had made her more critical than her parents and this was mixed with the anti-American sentiments discussed in Finding 1.

Ava: "I think our generation... is also a bit more critical of the type of media that's out there and what we're seeing on TV or on the radio and we question it maybe a bit more... everyone's a little bit, I don't know, critical of maybe the US now and everyone thinks there's a lot of, I don't know, propaganda, and advertisements and the main TV channels are slanted towards one political side or things like that. People sound more critical these days... Maybe back then [when my parents were young] it was just 'that's just the way it is' – no one really questioned it as heavily." S1

In one of the Brisbane groups, it was said of their parents:

"They were really gullible, they believed everything..."

"I think they used comparatively less. They didn't have the Internet obviously, or as much available.

"They really only had the radio and the paper, so that's sort of more limited, whereas now we have the radio, the paper, the Internet, you can get it on your mobile phone. It's everywhere now, so it's really in our face now, whereas back then they had to really make time for it and search for it." B4

### "IT'S JUST CONSTANT"

However, a faster paced and more complex media environment also meant that participants felt overloaded with information and competing demands as well as plagued by poor content. "It keeps you on the hop. You go from your junk mail to your 'this and that,' the email to phone, it's just constant," said one 36-40 year-old from Brisbane. (B4) As a result, most participants, particularly the youngest group in this research, reported using mobile phones, working online and listening to the radio or watching television all at once.

Participants often cited the Internet as a necessity for their study or work, and many expressed the view that media are both abundant and affordable in a way that empowers them, at least for work. One Western Australia participant said that while only a few years ago having a lot of media choice was a "city thing", more was now available in remote locations. In this way, mobility for their parents was a physical phenomenon. For today's younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds, mobility is often communication-based rather than physical.

**six.** Younger Australians have a strong sense of connection with particular media. **however...** There is often distrust and disconnection associated with media content.

**seven.** Younger Australians believe they are more capable of filtering information than previous generations.

**however...** Younger Australians feel media do not empower them to 'make change' on important issues.

Participants spoke of their parents walking from the bank to the post office only a few years ago and retaining this physicality in their daily routine, while for them, banking and mailing requires a click from one website to another website. The conclusion one might draw from thoughts these younger Australians have about the always-on and ubiquitous media channels is that media function at least (and perhaps only) to facilitate 'everyday living'.

## however... Younger Australians feel media do not empower them to 'make change' on important issues.

### "IT'S ALL A BIT FUTILE"

Multiple media tools constitute only part of the resources needed by younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds to enable their participation in public life. Following an extended discussion about the issues facing the world, and then Australia, participants were asked what they felt they could do about these issues, how they could make a difference, and what they needed, particularly from the media, to help them make a contribution.

Many responded with "I don't know" and some admitted being "bad with that sort of thing". As Kelly, of second-generation, Hong Kong background said: "It seems a bit futile. I feel like if you were to try to act towards one of those issues, it's really not going to do a lot." This was a common view. Others said they often found strength in numbers and felt a sense of moral support when they knew, often from the news media and the entertainment media, that they were not alone in the way they felt about an issue. They said things like they needed "to know that others out there share your point of view, and you can work together".

Margarita from Carnarvon proposed a bolder view of working with others:

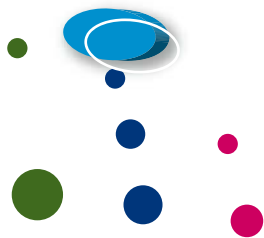
"I'd say if you could get a collective, if you've got a group that you have a similar point of view or a similar passion or drive or whatever it is I think as a collective you can change anything." <sup>w4</sup>

However, among the youngest age group in this study, there was a pronounced sense of disempowerment: "[I feel] we're talked down to... that our opinions don't matter... because we don't vote yet" said one participant in the 16-20 year-old Mount Ommaney group. (B5) A similar expression of disenfranchisement came from Karl (17) in Broome:

"It's the repetition... I almost got sick of hearing the same news over again. It wasn't because I didn't want hear about what happened; I just didn't want to hear it every half hour, exactly the same over and over and over again. I just started to put myself in a black hole..."

Richard, 26-30, third-generation, Inala/Richlands B2





"You can't [say] 'I've finished year 12, that makes me eligible for something'... It gives you no power... You have to have gone through uni, you have to have that experience, you have to have been overseas, you have to know what you're talking about through experience and by our age we just don't have that experience unless you go and travel." <sup>W5</sup>

There was an expectation, perhaps as a function of the popular and celebrity culture of contemporary media, that the wealthy and famous members of society would lead by example. "Maybe [media] can contribute a bit more... and could put an ad on saying, 'We put a billion dollars towards this, how about a donation...?'" said a Brisbane participant (B4) with a Sydney participant making a similar suggestion.

### "IF IT AFFECTED ME..."

Few respondents seemed to have a strong impetus for collective action to make social change. The emphasis appeared to be more about individual responses to individual concerns. A common sentiment was expressed by Erika.

"What can you do to change things? I think what you can do for yourself is educate yourself as much as you can on the topics and just talk, bring up the topics with people around you and just be open to other opinions and suggestions. So I think you can't really go out there guns blazing and try and start a group or anything until you actually educate yourself, [and] get all different views on it, not just one." <sup>S3</sup>

However, personal hardship was often identified as a catalyst to action: "when you experience it yourself... you'd probably want to make a change," said Mai Anh. (S5) Changes to workplace labour laws were discussed in this context with one Brisbane participant saying:

"I'd do something about it if it affected me. You often hear about workers getting less hours and stuff. I really don't think about it because I don't really know how they're disadvantaged from it, and I don't know anyone who is affected by it. So I don't really hear their point of the story, I just hear what the government is offering you or what they're taking away. So if it affected me personally or through friends and family then I'd probably take an interest..." <sup>B1</sup>

"If it affected us in such a way that, you know, it's unbearable [to us], or our family members [we'd] lobby to the government," was the response of one participant in Sydney. (S1) In Western Australia, Jason said, "When you've got something to lose... like wages... if you don't fight for that soon it will be gone...". (W3) Kylie agreed, "If it affects you directly right here and right now, then you're going to do something about it." (W3)

Not surprisingly, terrorism was an issue identified often by the focus groups (see Finding 1). To this particular issue, responses about what to do or what can be done were decidedly vague. For example, "So if you're more aware, then you are doing your part". (Ducy, B1)

Similarly, fear was seen, although somewhat vaguely, as a suggested catalyst. Participants said it "sometimes helps to be scared into action". The media were credited with the power to trigger this emotion: "Media is really really powerful, more powerful than politicians or people that actually do charity work." (S1)

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Participants identified other emotions that could be triggered by media coverage. Anger is a good example. Participants there said media can help by exposing neglect and corruption. Then people “get angry”. While one Bunbury participant said media can hit “an emotional cord,” motivation and action “comes down to your upbringing. So we [need to] teach our children”. (W2)

### **“THE MEDIA CAN HELP IN EDUCATING PEOPLE”**

The widespread view of the younger Australians in this study is that media are less than helpful. Beyond passivity, participants sometimes, but not always, spoke of wanting information they can act on. When others were pressed on the instrumental function of their media, they seemed to fall back on how media function for their work, school or consumer activities. Mainstream media were partly seen as ‘disabling’ because they were not trusted and their messages were not helpful. Many felt “bombarded” by media messages and felt they could do little about the stories they contained.

Thus, the most compelling discussions about engagement with social issues or problems, and the role of media generally, came in the form of how all media, including entertainment, could be constructive, instructive and illustrative. Tania crystallised the vision:

“Well the media could help. We were talking before about all this negativity. If they came out with a little bit more positive and good feeling and encouraged people to feel like they can contribute, even if it is only a little bit. And different people have different things that are important to them too. It’s like to you it might be going and protesting, to you it might be making a donation, to me it might be not eating a particular thing because of the damage that’s been done to the ocean, we all have our thing. So I think the media can help in educating, you know, people to know that they can make a difference...” <sup>S4</sup>

Many participants said that instead of sensational story-telling, un-addressed problems and unsolved crises, the mainstream media could help motivate citizen audiences by keeping them informed with complete, emotionally neutral and practical information. Scott said water-saving suggestions from the media were a good example. (B4) Similarly, Gordon said:

“Seeing the change, seeing what can happen. For example, one of the things... now is the hybrid or electric cars of the future... I think if that’s more portrayed on... free-to-air television... more people are getting access to it and there’s more of an incentive to... see what we can do... we can speed things up a little bit.” <sup>B4</sup>

“[I’m] frustrated to the fact that you know there are people out there that are very gullible and who do believe everything they see on TV and get this warped view of life. I know some fairly well educated people down in the south who firmly believe that every Aborigine in the north of Australia has got a new car because they’ve seen it on the telly and they believe it. So it can do a lot of damage...”

Allan, 36-40, first-generation, Scottish, Broome W6



Others mentioned problems like bird flu. For this, Michelle said the media should “just keep us informed more on certain things, make some suggestions of what we could do...”. (B4)

Participants saw working, studying and nurturing a family as impediments to engagement. Nevertheless, small, concrete examples of participation were seen as tools the media could offer to engage these younger Australians. Different programs like *Amber Alert* for missing children, simple advice on bushfires, and water conservation techniques were offered as examples. They could be incorporated into entertainment just as well as current affairs programming. “Just keep us informed of the small steps and changes and how that effect is going to [help]” said Gordon in Brisbane. (B4)

One participant made reference to the SBS program *Insight* (discussed below under Finding 9), and demonstrated how different, genuine points of view are sought. Presumably, the voices of other citizen audiences carried not only as feedback, but also programming content, will deliver the sort of practical engagement and involvement younger Australians are seeking.

But others said practical engagement, like practical tolerance (discussed in Finding 5 above), is individual and local. Nigel said: “You’ve probably got more chance of something happening at a local level but again it seems to be at a state level [our abilities to take part] are taken away”. (W4) Richard from Broome offered the most pragmatic, perhaps Australian and youthful recommendation for the citizen audience: “Speak out about injustice regardless of what you might lose, be true to yourself, have compassion for others and go fishing”. (W6)

## Considerations

Media are woven into the fabric of everyday life for younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds, and yet content-delivery media such as television and newspapers are regarded and used with scepticism. For the youngest of the participants in this study, newer platforms such as online media, mobile telephones, and text messaging are an answer to the deficiencies of traditional media. As a result of using a wider range of newer and older media, participants felt they more actively filtered media content than earlier generations.

However, they feel let down by the media mix at their disposal because media do not make them feel empowered to make changes on those issues that determine their socio-political experiences. A message to the media from these younger Australians is ‘give us clear, positive messages about solutions and everyday actions that we can take so that we can be better citizen audiences’. This message is elaborated in relation to news and current affairs in the next section of this report.

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**however...**  
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## Experiences with media and disconnection

"Back in the '80s okay, I moved out and had a child when I was like 16 and my baby died and I had to pay rent, live on my own, do shopping, pay all these bills, and my wage was only 78 dollars and 78 cents. So I lobbied the government to help single people that were working..."

*Because that was a challenge – what happened?*

"Exactly. That was the youth allowance, but they changed that whole youth allowance that I pushed and rallied for and now kids are at school and their parents are earning the money and they're spending it on the wrong things, whereas that whole thing that I pushed for and the government said no child is going to be, you know, hungry and in poverty, you know. My face was in the *Herald* because I lobbied and pushed for that and the government turned the whole thing upside down and I feel like I pushed that, put that in, and it's not helping the people that it's supposed to be meant for. And when I went on Ray Martin, he says 'come on the show' and he put me on the show and I totally walked off, because when you're on air they ask you totally different questions, do this, do that – never again – Triple J, all of it – never again..."

**Cathy 36-40, first-generation, Croatian, Strathfield/Burwood/Ashfield S4**

# NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS: CYNICISM AND VALUES

## Introduction

*Living Diversity* largely considered audience engagement with news and current affairs in conjunction with other parts of the broader media environment. It found that while non-English speaking background audiences displayed a preference for international news – relative to national and local news – when compared to the national audience, this was much more the case for first-generation than second-generation Australians (*Living Diversity*, 2002: 53). *Living Diversity* also found that although people remained relatively optimistic about life in Australia, they were sceptical about the media; a finding that is confirmed in this study (see Findings 6-7).

Even though they have access to more information through a greater range of media technologies than ever before, contemporary generations of younger audiences appear to be reading, watching and listening to *increasingly less* news and current affairs. Related to this declining interest in information media among younger audiences are concerns regarding this group's perceived cynicism and apathy towards social and political issues.

In this section, we examine the ability of news and current affairs to encourage meaningful engagement with social issues for younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds.

The findings suggest the problematic relationship between news and information, social engagement and generational change, is not simply a matter of changing audiences or short attention spans. As younger audiences, the participants displayed considerable cynicism towards the news media and many participants in this study found little in the news that inspired them to think they could play a role as citizens. These negative attitudes towards the news media and the events they describe are largely the result of the way the news media covers issues, not any inherent apathy on the part of younger Australians from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Participants in this study did want to know what was happening in the world and what they could do about it, and they drew on a range of information sources – which they consumed in a highly critical fashion – to find out about issues that mattered to them. Despite the increasing move towards 'infotainment' in news coverage, it is very apparent from comments made in the focus groups that audiences still make clear distinctions between 'news' and 'entertainment' genres, as well as between 'tabloid' and 'serious' journalism. They also have very clear expectations of the role these should play in their media consumption. It seems that these younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds are not disengaging from public life, just the mainstream news media's version of it.

**eight.** Audiences are highly critical of news and current affairs.

**however...**  
Audiences still value the role news and current affairs are supposed to play.

**nine.** 'Depressing' one-way traditional media produces cynicism among younger audiences.  
**however...**  
Younger audiences engage with world issues through a variety of sources.

# eight.

## Audiences are highly critical of news and current affairs.

### "I HATE WATCHING THE NEWS"

Despite the older participants displaying a preference for news and current affairs as the main reason they use the mass media, there was remarkable consistency across age and cultural background in terms of attitudes towards the news media. The majority of participants had extremely negative attitudes towards the news media, which manifested itself in terms of antipathy and outright hostility. The anger participants felt towards news and current affairs was borne out of frustration due to the fact they did not feel it was providing them with the information they needed to engage with the world as citizens. Participants saw the need to be involved with news and information and many actively sought it out. However, most did not seem particularly enthusiastic about doing so.

Claims by the participants that they did not consume, or deliberately avoided news and current affairs were rare, but were made by some participants in all three age bands. In keeping with Finding 6 regarding age differences in the types of media consumption, it was older participants (26+ year-olds) who were more likely to claim they made a special effort to keep up with the news. Overall, there was very little to suggest consuming news and current affairs facilitated a greater understanding of, or ability to play a constructive role in public life for the participants. The frustration this produced led to quite scathing criticisms:

Tina: "It actually makes me angry, a lot of it, because it feels like it's just propaganda, they're just feeding you crap." <sup>S4</sup>

Gordon: "I get the urge to get the news station to send me the 10 minutes of my life back... [because] some of the stories just seem a waste..." <sup>B4</sup>

Douglas: "I hate watching the news, and every time I see really horrific things happen I go, 'Okay, this is why I don't like watching the news'. It goes straight off. I can't handle it." <sup>S2</sup>

All of the focus groups were highly critical of current affairs and were equally critical of the journalists and organisations that produce it. The following themes dominated participants' criticism of the news media.

### TRIVIALISATION: "THE LATEST HOLLYWOOD STORY"

Participants criticised media's emphasis on what they saw as trivial news – for example, "the latest Hollywood story" (Natalie, S5) or "snapshots of Britney Spears" (Gordon, B4) – at the expense of "other things happening in the world that probably more affect our lives". (Jack, S1) As Lena bluntly put it: "I wouldn't spend \$6 to read about gossip. I get disgusted that those people's privacy is very open...". (B6) Such attitudes did not mean participants – particularly those in the younger groups – did not enjoy these issues or were not influenced by celebrity culture. For example, Irene (S3) admitted to buying a product because it was endorsed by the American celebrity Jessica Simpson. Rather, they felt conventional news and current affairs was not an appropriate channel for celebrity coverage. As one participant, Zoey, said: "if I wanted to know about that, I'd go and buy a magazine about it". (B5) Similarly, participants criticised the trivialisation of serious topics, such as political news.

Tamara: "... when we have federal elections here, I get angry at the amount of money that gets spent on propaganda... to me it's more just a slanging match between two parties, rather than disseminating proper information about what their policies are..." <sup>S1</sup>

### EXPLOITATION: THE NEWS MEDIA CAN "SUCK YOU IN"

The tabloid news and current affairs conventions of focusing on 'battlers' struggling against what are portrayed as heartless bureaucracies or being exploited by unscrupulous businesspeople were themselves seen by participants as a form of exploitation. These stories were designed to "suck you in" (Mirrin, W5) for the benefit of producing emotion by focusing on what some saw as soft targets. One participant, Douglas, went so far as to say that in these types of stories "[t]he victims make me angry, more so than the conman sometimes". (S2)

### NEGATIVITY: "... ALL THE NEWS THAT YOU SEE IS BAD"

Participants felt media's emphasis on negative news was a deliberate strategy to maximise audiences. For example, Yaya claimed news was designed to be "really juicy" in order to make audiences "really shocked and they buy more and more newspapers". (S3) Jin argued the news media's primary role was to "get us frightened", and like other parents in the study, told of often avoiding news and current affairs, and media in general, in order to avoid exposing his children to distressing events. (B4) News media coverage of the 'war on terror' was singled out for its emphasis on negativity.

Scott: "The media's really shrunk things over the last 30 years haven't they?... There's a bombing in Iraq 20 minutes ago and you see it on TV. Thirty years ago you'd get a newspaper report about it two weeks later and you're kind of desensitised then. Now

it's in your face: 'Oh, Iraq, there's another 20 soldiers killed'; 'Only 20 today? Oh, a good day'." <sup>B4</sup>

This emphasis on negativity in the reporting of international news, in particular, produced a feeling of insularity among some group members. This illustrates the paradox of both openness and fear of, and for, the world discussed in Finding 1. As Simon put it: "Because all the news that you see is all bad. It doesn't make me feel like travelling overseas. I'd rather stay here, I feel safer here." (B2) Similarly, Nick asked, after a discussion about coverage of the Schapelle Corby trial and 'the Bali nine' arrests, "Would you be scared to go to Indonesia now?" (B3)

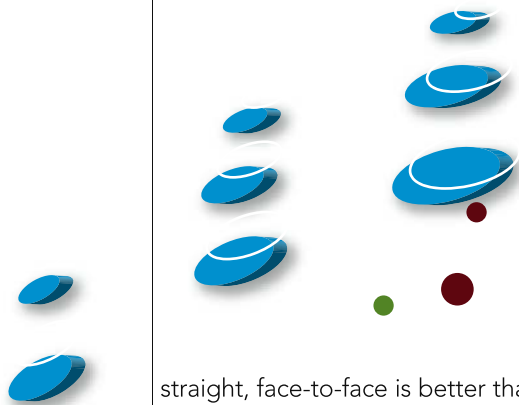
### PERCEIVED BIAS: "IT'S A BUSINESS..."

Some participants described news agendas and opinions as being strongly influenced by media owners who aim to protect their own interests at the expense of developing citizens. For Trevor, the news media "isn't like a community service... it's a business, not a service, and how can you compete in that situation...". (B6) Participants regularly described news and current affairs as providing "filtered" information, which was contrasted with the "raw" information obtained from talking to other people about issues. (Jin, B4) As Grace observed: "People in the media tend to manipulate it so... as the audience we sometimes need to balance it out with our own view". (W2) For example, Dudy stressed how much he valued talking to his father about issues "because he's been through quite a lot and the stories that he tells me are very interesting and pretty much he's always 99% of the time correct...". (B1) Other participants also cited conversations with friends, family and colleagues as being important sources of information, because, in the words of one participant, Chelsea: "The TV is full of crap so getting someone to tell you something

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straight, face-to-face is better than getting it second-hand". (W5) In this context, one of the key characteristics of 'good' information for these participants was the authenticity of "someone that's actually been there, seen something happening, and reports from their own personal experience, rather than just a reporter saying 'this happened, that happened'...". (Michelle, B4)

### **LACK OF RELEVANCE: EVENTS IN THE NEWS SEEM "REALLY DISTANT"**

The stories presented in the conventional news media lacked significance for many of the participants because they were perceived as failing to engage with issues in a way that connected with their everyday lives. One participant, Josephine, described the news as feeling "really distant" and was unable to see how the events being described impacted on her life. (S3) Participants of all ages made an attempt to search for personal relevance in news and current affairs stories, with several respondents claiming they often thought about how they would react or behave if placed in the situations depicted. A sense of engagement was linked to relevance and there was a significant age or stage of life component to this. Participants under the age of 18, in particular, said they would be more concerned about political issues if they were able to vote.

For other participants, proximity – both geographical and cultural – played a role in determining how strongly they invested in stories. This sense of disengagement was amplified by the fact that the news media's focus on a limited news agenda often came at the expense of what some felt were more relevant local stories. For example, members of the regional Western Australia focus groups tended to express a greater – or at least more specific – interest in issues that connected their communities to the rest of the state and the nation. As a result, the regional

Western Australia groups – especially 36-40 year-olds – also seemed the most interested in newspapers as a source of important information because they were seen as being the best at providing detailed coverage of local news and also provided a way of remaining connected to events at a state, national and international level (even if papers such as *The West Australian* and *The Australian* had to be freighted in up to 24 hours after publication). However, even for these participants, there were limits to localism.

Chris: "Well it's something that happens here, a minor incident might get a whole heap of coverage but a major incident overseas will only get 30 seconds at the end – they'll [say], 'Oh, a thousand people died in a mudslide in Mexico' or something; whereas at the front of the news is, 'Some person died on [the] South Western Highway' or something." <sup>W1</sup>

### **LACK OF DIVERSITY: "THEY'LL HAVE THE SAME STORY"**

The lack of diversity in the news agendas of the commercial networks in particular (including the use of file and news agency material and the recycling of images and interviews), was a source of frustration for many participants. When asked what news issues had captured their attention in the past week, participants cited the same stories including: the Schapelle Corby trial and 'the Bali nine' arrests, the war in Iraq, terrorism, bird flu, the birth of Princess Mary of Denmark's son, and the earthquake in Pakistan. Local stories were also mentioned, including the controversial toll and traffic management issues of the new cross-city tunnel in Sydney, the fluoridation of drinking water and drought in Brisbane, and the use of seatbelts on school buses in Western Australia. In addition to clearly demonstrating the news media's agenda-setting function (that is, not influencing audiences in terms of how to think about issues, but rather influencing them in

terms of what issues to think of as important in the first place) the consistency with which these stories were mentioned also provides strong evidence that younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds are at least paying attention to the news. However, the extent to which the presentation of these stories actually plays a role in encouraging engagement with issues in public life is questionable. For example, one participant, Kelly (S1), claimed the only reason she could remember the news stories mentioned above was because “it just gets drummed into you” through the same stories being repeated in different bulletins and publications. Once again, commercial imperatives were seen as overriding the news media’s role in providing relevant information.

Julie: “Channel 7 is always trying to compete with 9... *A Current Affair* and [*Today*] *Tonight* have the same stories and it's just hysterical... It's gotten to the stage where honestly you flick from one to the other, and the story could be absolutely pitiful, something about vacuum cleaners or food products, margarine – and they'll have the same story...” <sup>S2</sup>

Participants also criticised the Australian news media for being too parochial in its coverage, “unless of course it's a major event overseas like the tsunami or the Pakistan earthquake”. (Jack, S1) However, these criticisms were largely directed at the commercial media, and news and current affairs on the ABC and SBS were praised for their detailed coverage of international news.

Alex: “If you watch Channel 9 news or something, they'll have more of an Australian perspective, whereas SBS will have it more as how it affects the whole world. It gives a more open view of what's actually happened.” <sup>B5</sup>

Kerry Jane: “And then you watch SBS and then they actually throw all this other different world news at you and you think, ‘Oh look at what else is going on in the world...’” <sup>W3</sup>

### STEREOTYPING CULTURAL GROUPS: “SOMETIMES THEY CAN PORTRAY US AS CRIMINALS”

Related to participants’ criticisms of the parochialism of the mainstream news media’s agenda, and apparent disregard for other nations except in times of conflict or disaster, were concerns that Australian news media portrayed a range of cultural groups in an overtly negative fashion. For example, one participant, Donna, commented “... with Asians, sometimes they can portray us as criminals, drug dealers, really bad...”, (B5) while Allan argued the media went “out of their way to find the worst example and... paint everyone with the same brush...”. (W6)

However, public concerns regarding the portrayal of cultural diversity in the media are a complex issue. As the comments above demonstrate, criticisms of stereotypes are only one criticism among many levelled by participants at the news media. Being critical of how the media stereotyped ethnic and religious groups did not prevent some participants in this study from using the same stereotypes themselves when discussing their own everyday experiences of multiculturalism. In this context, criticisms of media stereotypes and hysteria around cultural diversity are paradoxical.

While the comments of the focus group participants do represent valid criticisms of the news media, when juxtaposed against other comments (see Findings 1-5) they seem to emerge as an example of a socially acceptable ‘script’ used by the speakers to mark themselves out as ‘media literate’ in comparison to other group members and

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the 'general public'. Nevertheless, criticisms of the ways in which news and current affairs single out cultural groups as 'problems' and 'threats' were made by a range of participants and, understandably among people from culturally diverse backgrounds, the effects of this stereotyping were harshly felt by some. Perhaps the harshest criticism of the news media in these terms came from Karl, who (apparently influenced by what he had learned at school, where media criticism is often a part of the curriculum) saw the reporting of different cultural groups on nightly current affairs programs as a form of 'dog whistle journalism' (Manning 2003; Poynting et al 2004), pandering to audiences' pre-existing prejudices:

"... we have been doing this in English, like looking at media and how they sort of bend the truth and it's all biased. Now I watch... *A Current Affair*, *Today Tonight*, those sorts of shows, just mainstream crap, just made for the white suburban middle-aged woman sitting at home watching it... and I just think, 'This is such trash'... 'cause what they say is biased." <sup>W5</sup>

The focus groups for this study were conducted soon after a *Today Tonight* story which featured a group of young Muslim males claiming they would never fully 'integrate' into the Australian community. The story was later featured on the ABC's *Media Watch* following complaints of misrepresentation from the young men who were interviewed. This story was mentioned by several participants as an archetypal example of the treatment of Islam by the current affairs programs of the commercial television networks, with one participant, Jackson, suggesting the story was edited in a way that "made these guys sound really racist... made out they were terrorists". (B5) However, for some, the media's focus on only the most extreme examples of cultural groups had clearly influenced their thinking.

"... the Muslim leader here who is the left-wing guy who's really crazy, he says '... we will never act like Australians'... so they're coming to Australia trying to be Australians but they're not going to act like Australians..." <sup>B4</sup>

Ironically, this comment was made in a group of 36-40 year-olds who felt older Australians had more positive attitudes towards cultural diversity than younger Australians. Interestingly, the findings of *Living Diversity* contradicted this. *Living Diversity* (2002: 18) found that younger Australians were more supportive of cultural diversity and that this support decreased with age. However, while they were still susceptible to its influence, younger groups in this study seemed well aware of the media's ability to stereotype cultural groups, often drawing on personal interactions with people from other cultures as the basis for comparisons. For example, several participants cited the 'moral panic' surrounding young Muslim males following the well-publicised gang rapes in Sydney in 2001, to which Jackson's response was: "I have friends who are Muslim, female as well, and they don't treat females like dirt..." (B5)

Perceptions of the Australian news media were often influenced by cultural background and participants, who had experience of news and current affairs in their country of birth, used it as a point of comparison.

Lena: "I have Russian background. I really appreciate that we have a democracy, coming out of a socialistic regime. And I really appreciate that you have freedom of speech and we can hear different things. I mainly rely on TV. I listen as much as possible to news, sometimes on different channels, it could be 7 and 9 and sometimes I watch SBS or Channel 2 [ABC] a little bit more for world news." <sup>B6</sup>



"Back in Singapore it's a lot worse, the government pretty much tries to control how people think and you can't like openly criticise politicians or parties, not in the papers, you can't do that. I actually thought it was pretty good here." <sup>S3</sup>

## however...

Audiences still value the role news and current affairs are supposed to play.

A question which immediately arises out of such concerns about the news media's ability to foster social change is why audiences continue to claim news and current affairs are so important when they have such negative opinions of it, and also believe the information it presents plays a role in disempowering them as citizens. Many respondents in this study noted the importance of news and current affairs to maintaining a well-informed citizenry and healthy democracy, so the negative attitudes expressed appear to stem from an overwhelming sense of negativity produced by the genre itself measured against the journalistic values of objectivity, credibility, relevance and impartiality. For example, Michael claimed "news is really important, on TV and also on the Internet. I think everyone should listen to the news and get an idea of what goes on around the world". (B3) Similarly, Paul spoke of the importance of news in his life:

"I guess I have an uncomfortable feeling if I haven't watched TV or had the radio on for the day or something... It makes you feel a bit uncomfortable, uneasy. It's like a fix really, a news fix or *A Current Affair* fix..." <sup>B4</sup>

Some participants saw contemporary journalism as having declined from a 'golden age':

Gordon: "There's a lot more reliance on the information you get from the news, which again is limited here, where back 30 years ago there was more accountability as far as the delivery of the news – they wouldn't get away with the same things they're putting on the news today..." <sup>B4</sup>

However, the sense of media literacy the participants in this study shared, and which they saw as marking them out as different from previous generations, was cited by some as a key factor in enabling them to engage with news and current affairs. For example, Brisbane participants argued that "you don't have to agree" (B5) with the news media because "[s]urely by now, we've grown up with television, radio and everything else, you can decide from what you hear... read between the lines... sometimes you have to do that..." (B4)

## nine.

'Depressing' one-way traditional media produces cynicism among younger audiences.

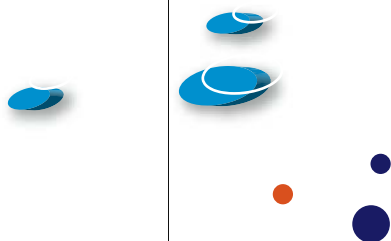
Evidence from the focus groups strongly suggests younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds are highly cynical of the way the news media portray social and political issues. However, it is extremely important to note that while they were cynical of news media representations of these issues, they were not cynical and apathetic towards the issues themselves. Participants wanted the news media to connect them with issues they felt were important at local, national

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and international levels, but when this did not happen, they tended to simply 'give up' on conventional sources of news and current affairs. Cynicism towards the mainstream news media's treatment of issues resulted in many of the participants adopting a highly critical approach to their news and current affairs consumption. Indeed, the strong sense of disengagement from news and current affairs issues seemed to be a calculated strategy on the part of many audience members who felt overwhelmed by and unable to control what they saw as the repetition of news about negative and depressing events. Several focus group participants cited the Schapelle Corby story as an example of this. For example, Jennifer (B2) claimed she was "sick" of hearing about "appeal after appeal" and this made her "just switch off", while another participant, Tina, wished the news media would "just leave it up to the courts" and simply report the final verdict. (S1)

### **"ALL YOU SEE IS JUST DISASTER"**

The constant negativity of the news and current affairs agenda had led some people to appear to become desensitised to the events it portrayed. Again, this appeared to be a conscious response to the lack of control participants felt in engaging with news and current affairs, and media generally, which was highlighted in Finding 7. For example, Sven said the news did not make him angry because "[y]ou get used to it after a while, like you see it so often... it just doesn't affect me much any more as it used to". (B3) There was a strong feeling of helplessness among participants in terms of feeling they were able to contribute or "make a difference" to the issues they felt were important (see Finding 7). As Jennifer put it: "I look at it in the big picture and think, 'Oh well there's no point, I'm just this one little thing and what am I going to do?'" (B2) Participants fluctuated in their opinions regarding the potential of media to facilitate social and

cultural change. Some, like Ava (S1), felt "the power is all with the media" in encouraging change, while others felt media had quite limited potential for facilitating social and cultural change beyond broadly and generally informing audiences, and this reinforced the sense of helplessness for participants.

Alisa: "Well, I think... the fact that you watch it and they're telling you the information, but they're not actually doing anything about it and they're just telling you what's happening... that sort of gets to you, that you can't really do anything and you don't really want to know about it, it's a bit depressing." w1

However, the overall impression that emerged from the group discussions was that the news media should be doing more to encourage positive change in Australia (see Finding 7). The 'one-way' nature of traditional media messages and the sense of helplessness they generate, added to the feeling that media was depressing and influenced the tendency to "switch off".

As Kerri Jane bluntly put it, engaging with the news media makes her "very desensitised and apathetic". (W3) The news media's ability to make audiences want to disengage from it was a common theme throughout the groups:

Jimmy: "... all you see is just disaster and like negative things, like you just want to disconnect from that. You just do things that are more positive." s6

Markham: "I just think that I get turned off sometimes by the fact that there's so much terribleness in the world... and I just won't follow the news for a while." w3

Some participants observed that the media could encourage positive change by increasing the diversity of cultural, social and political perspectives represented in news and current affairs to “[s]how other people a different point of view”. (W1) Miguel argued that “it’s quite rare to see on the news someone who is an activist or doing voluntary work and helping – very rare to find [that] kind of report on TV...”. (S4) The most forceful examples of the news media inspiring engagement with social and cultural politics came from participants who were reacting to what they perceived as its failings. For example, we already saw (in Finding 5) how Tania established a mothers’ group with a Muslim woman after they were both “mortified” by a *60 Minutes* episode which “absolutely trashed” Islamic culture. (S4) To this end, ABC and SBS news and current affairs were once again highly praised – largely by older participants – for their continuing commitment to news and information that empowers audiences as citizens. While the 16-20 year-old groups acknowledged the quality of SBS news, they also felt that this was a characteristic that marked the broadcaster as being for older audiences.

As discussed in Finding 6, participants’ criticism of news media for contributing to the cynicism and apathy among its audiences, also extended to their attitudes towards interacting with media at a grass roots level. Rita spoke of feeling exploited and manipulated by the media while working as an advocate for a youth allowance: “... I went on Ray Martin... I totally walked off, because when you’re on air they ask you totally different questions... never again... Triple J, all of it...”. (S4) Some participants paid lip service to the idea of ‘talking back’ to the media through letters, emails and phone calls. For example, Nick said while he “couldn’t be bothered” responding to and attempting to enter into dialogues with the media, “if something really woke me

up, like if [talkback radio host] Stan Zemanek was saying something stupid, I might feel compelled to call him up and give him a piece of my mind...”. (B3)

## however... Younger audiences engage with world issues through a variety of sources.

### “A PORTAL TO THE WHOLE WORLD...”

Among the younger groups, the development of critical attitudes towards the news media also seemed to be a function of increasing maturity and education, with Mai Anh claiming that “you’re taught to have a critical eye about... the news” in school. (S5) One participant, Irene, argued that her more critical and multi-sourced media consumption made her more knowledgeable about issues than most people: “It makes me angry because from what I’ve seen from other sources, I know what it really is...”. (S3) While criticising the quality of the commercial news media, Tania also acknowledged the existence of, and a desire for more alternative sources of information.

**“We’re just so used to the sort of commercialism that we tolerate it, put up with it and don’t look for alternatives. If you look for alternatives there are certainly still plenty of things out there.”** S4

Participants felt that because they were surrounded by media, they did not need to rely on a single source of news and current affairs, but rather could select information that suited their needs and lifestyles. For example, Naomi described the current media environment as offering “a portal to the whole world, because it’s really convenient technology, it’s right at

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our fingertips, I mean the news coverage that we get now is amazing, I think that's the most important thing about it". (B5) For younger generations of Australians, news and information is simply just another element of the media culture that fits seamlessly into their lives.

Irene: "I don't go out looking for the information but if it's on the news then I'll listen. I don't think, 'Oh, I'll watch the news or I've got to get a newspaper', but if it comes to me then I'll watch it..." s3

#### **NEW MEDIA AS SOURCES OF INFORMATION: "... IT'S FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE"**

Respondents saw the increase in information channels produced by newer media forms, such as pay TV and the Internet, as offering greater diversity in news and current affairs coverage: "I have the choice of seeing what I can choose to look at on the Internet, whereas TV, every channel that you turn on has got the same thing on it. On the Internet, I can choose to read it or I can read on and look for a recipe or something like that...". (Glenda, B6) Some younger participants found it possible to remain informed while bypassing traditional news outlets altogether. For example, Yaya found out about the Bali bombing from a friend who found out via an SMS from another friend, claiming: "I never even came home and watched the news or anything, pretty heartless of me, but yeah...". (S3)

This diversity – both in terms of channels and information – was seen as allowing audiences more freedom to develop their own opinions on issues. For example, Nigel found the range of information available on the Internet provided a "more balanced... view of different things". (W4) The diversity of information available on the Internet was also seen to allow audiences to pursue aspects of the news agenda they found relevant.

"It's more direct and it's faster. Like if you watch TV, you can't access the other information that you want at that point. On the Internet it's instant and you know if you're not happy with what you find you can try again." w2

As such, there was a strong sense of technological determinism among the groups in relation to their ability to engage with news and current affairs distributed via new technologies. More media almost seemed to equal better media, and they had little regard for the fact this newer material may have come from the same source they were highly critical of (for example, most news on ninemsn is often simply a replay of stories from the *National Nine News*, both of which are owned by Publishing and Broadcasting Limited).

There also seemed to be little regard for the fact that online news could suffer from the same problems participants identified earlier in traditional sources of news and current affairs. However, this fact was not lost on some participants. For example, Miguel pointed out, "Sometimes we find a lot of online newspapers and a lot of channels on cable TV, but in terms of the information it's the same, the same interpretation, the same bias in terms of interpreting certain issues..."; (S4) and Jamie argued, "[y]ou'll find that the net now is as much of a muchness as what the TV is". (S3)

Again, there was a cultural dimension to the comparisons of older participants in particular. With audiences now existing in a global media environment due to the penetration of pay TV channels and the Internet, Miguel pointed to the homogenisation of content across these global media forms. "Sometimes I check some South American newspapers and it's the same thing, even they are using the same words, because they use the same sources..." (S4)

### THE POWER OF CONVERSATION: "IT'S THE ONLY WAY I REALLY KNOW STUFF."

However, the potential diversity of opinion that the Internet offered was a recurring theme throughout the discussions and, as described in Finding 8, participants spoke of a desire to understand complex news issues from a variety of perspectives as a way of overcoming the perceived bias of individual news outlets, noting that discussing issues with friends, family and colleagues was an extremely important way for them to make sense of the world. For example, as one participant notes: "Yeah, my parents, when I'm around my parents I hear them talking about it and everything. It's the only way I really know stuff about anything". (S3) Drawing on the power of conversation as a way of allowing multiple – and often conflicting – opinions to be heard in an unbiased forum, participants spoke positively of news and current affairs shows based around 'talk' or 'chat', with both the Chatswood/Willoughby 26-30 and Broome 16-20 age groups nominating SBS's *Insight* as an excellent example of this format:

Ava: "... they have really good topics, like multiculturalism in Australia, or the Macquarie Fields riots, and they get politicians and they get people of the public, they get real people, and you hear different people's opinions. And I find that's quite an informative way of finding out quite a bit about a topic..." s1

The 16-20 year-old Broome group even suggested the focus group discussion they were participating in would make an informative television format for young audiences. Other participants referred to the fact that conversation not only connected people to news and current affairs events, but also helped build communities through this:

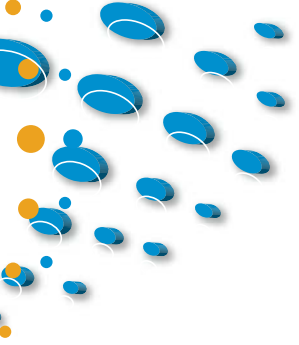
Jack: "I think you end up telling other people about it, what you read. It's a good way to make conversation – not just because *The Sydney Morning Herald* says it is – it's a good way to make conversation with others..." s1

## Considerations

Findings 8-9 demonstrate that although older audiences may be more likely to engage with news media and claim that it is important to their lives, it does not mean older generations necessarily have more positive attitudes towards genres such as news and current affairs. These findings show that increasing interest in news and current affairs is linked to factors including age, geographical location, cultural background, education, familial status and employment. However, the negative comments about news and current affairs expressed across the three age bands, suggest it remains to be seen whether audiences are 'maturing' into consumers of conventional information genres at an increasingly later age, or whether this maturation has stopped altogether. Either way, these findings provide evidence to suggest it may no longer be appropriate to talk about the problem of *young people's* disenfranchisement from news and information, as if it is somehow divorced from the more general disenfranchisement felt by the audience overall. They suggest the problem seems to be persisting and indeed, worsening, as each successive generation of 'youth' gets older.

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However, this analysis also argues that in many ways, it is the news media that actually help produce this audience's cynicism and disengagement from public life, resulting in these younger people avoiding news and current affairs. Such a situation provides an important redressing of concerns about young people's cynicism and apathy towards social and political issues. Rather than younger people's lack of interest in news issues being a symptom of cynicism and apathy, their comments strongly suggest

the cynicism and apathy displayed towards political and social issues is, in fact, partly *produced* by mainstream news and current affairs. The criticisms of the news media made by participants in this study are not simply the product of bored audiences who seek more stimulating media. Rather, in criticising journalism for not living up to its ideals of serving democracy and inspiring social change, the participants are in fact endorsing a strong belief in those ideals.

## Discussion from Strathfield/Burwood/Ashfield 16-20 year-olds group

"A little while ago, with the asylum seekers... John Howard had a big hand in what was presented to the media and to the people. There were certain photographs that were deliberately either distorted or not shown properly on the television and that deceived people's view about what was actually the truth and what was not. So yeah, I guess the truth when it comes down to people it's sieved through so many levels that we're never sure if we're actually hearing the right information..."

**Ritika, first-generation, Indian**

"... on Channel Ten I was watching, this was a while back when the terrorists [concern] was at its peak, and they were just saying they had a lot of talk about how Islam is very violent... and it showed footage of them torturing American soldiers and that, and then I watched the Arabic channel on Foxtel, ART, and they had the total opposite, of them torturing kids, like Muslim kids and that... Like, what's going on out there? I want to know the truth."

**Ben, second-generation, Lebanese**

"It seems silly that the government thinks that Australia's quite a well-educated country, and lots of people do have their own opinions, but they kind of overlook that... the people who control the media. And the people that do control the media are people that have big corporations and have heaps of money and can pay for that, so you really only see their opinion."

**Josephine, third-generation, Hungarian**

# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

*Connecting Diversity* tells a very different story about younger Australians from culturally diverse backgrounds from that which is often discussed in debates about generational change. Far from being apathetic, the focus group participants in this study are hungry for citizenship; for participation in public life and engagement with democracy. They are seeking connection through media and through personal relationships and are searching for better, more trustworthy tools with which to influence the world around them.

This enthusiasm is tempered by frustration because media are often seen as irrelevant and biased, or corrupted by overt agendas which the 'average person' cannot change. There is a real demand for better cultural democracy, and media are at the centre of this. New media platforms are providing significant forms of engagement for younger audiences. The challenge for media organisations is to find ways to capitalise on this social and technological change; to talk *with* audiences, rather than to them. The paradoxes revealed by this study present opportunities and challenges for media organisations and provide better grounding for national debates.

One of these opportunities is to deepen our national understanding of diversity, and that means embracing the complexities, the paradoxes and the apparent contradictions revealed in this study.

The responses of the participants in this study reveal that Australian multiculturalism today is seen in a very different light to 30 years ago, when multicultural policies were generally understood as *managing difference* among groups of discrete ethnic 'minority' communities. Younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds now define themselves as part of mainstream Australia. Cultural diversity has become mainstream for younger Australians, particularly second- and third-generation Australians, in a way that differs radically from the experiences of their parents' or grandparents'. The multiculturalism embraced by younger people is based on intercultural connection, not separate communities, although there is endorsement for the freedom to maintain one's cultural heritage and language. This connection arises both because many younger Australians tend to come from culturally hybrid backgrounds, and because they relate to an array of social groups and cultural identities.

This does not mean that there are no tensions in multicultural Australia; unquestionably there are. However, these tend to sit alongside



support for multiculturalism because it expands understanding and broadens horizons. Our findings suggest that intolerance and exclusion can be addressed by enhancing opportunities for intercultural connection and understanding.

The findings of this study challenge us to think more deeply about the connections and divisions in Australian society. The findings raise the following calls to action:

- **Discussion about Australian diversity needs to move beyond attacking or defending multiculturalism.**

The 'for' or 'against' positions of much public discussion about multicultural policies, immigration and cultural diversity are overly simplistic. Multiculturalism consists of many different policies and practices. Attitudes and responses to each of these will depend on the ways they are experienced in particular contexts. As multicultural Australia matures, younger Australians appreciate cultural diversity as providing a *learning experience* for living with difference.

- **Work still needs to be done to advance the 'unfinished business' of multiculturalism.**

The paradox that tolerance and intolerance sit together in everyday life means that we still need policies and programs to carefully and sensitively manage diversity for all Australians. Cultural diversity is a lived reality in Australia, yet the development of an inclusive society cannot be left to chance. It requires work in developing social connections and intercultural engagement. Government and media have a significant influence on the public perception of cultural diversity and must continue to play a central role.

- **Media and national debates need to reflect the intercultural exchange which underlies 'everyday cosmopolitanism'.**

This research has revealed a common capacity to deal with differences positively and productively, through 'practical tolerance'. This is not simply because Australians are naturally 'decent and fair', nor is it to say that society enjoys unproblematic social harmony. Living with difference in contemporary Australia means living with ethnic stereotypes, racism and discrimination. Despite this, when relationships are formed, cultural difference is appreciated for stimulating new ways of connecting with others. For these reasons, media are increasingly important as a means to challenge prejudices and ignorance and to enable genuine public discussion.

Just younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds now see themselves and each other in new ways, they also regard media, and consume media, differently. They show a clear capacity to participate, and to seek content that both engages them and provides opportunities for connection. The challenge for media organisations is to find ways to:

- **Tell stories in a way that embraces cultural complexity and allows audiences to learn more about one another.**

The impetus for media is to deliver audiences new ways of approaching cross-cultural storytelling which are neither tokenistic nor simplistic. Our findings reveal that younger Australian audiences are comfortable with the complexities of Australian cultural diversity and are looking not only for better understanding for themselves, but for all Australians.

- **Offer a greater diversity of sources, including voices of 'real people', in public discussions.**

The respondents in this study valued the perspectives of 'real people' rather than just 'expert voices' on important topics



canvassed by media. Their filtering of information and scepticism about news sources was often founded in distrust of traditional media. Instead, they desired fewer agenda-driven perspectives and more forums in which 'real' people were given the opportunity to air their views.

- **Encourage connections through media that are individual and interpersonal.**

The participants expressed interest in understanding other perspectives as well as voicing their own opinions. They wanted guidance on ways to make a difference and respond to important issues. The popularity of entertainment programs offering audience interaction (for example, SMS voting) suggests opportunities for participatory programming about meaningful issues on all platforms – television, radio, online and other digital media.

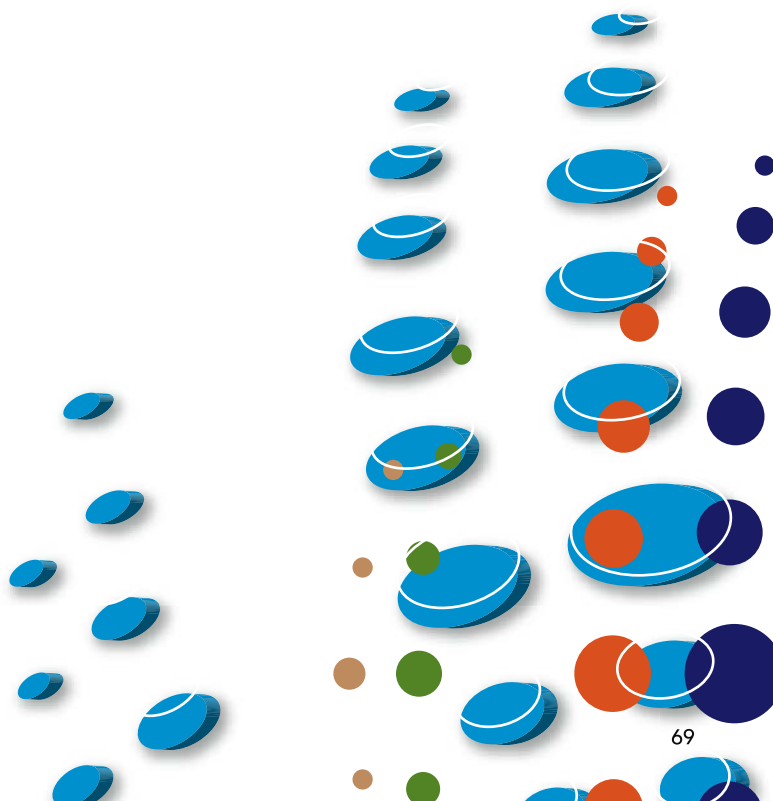
- **Emphasise a commitment to objective, accurate and impartial information delivery.**

Unlike many other news providers, public broadcasters have a commitment to newsworthiness and story selection that is always determined by public interest and not commercial considerations. An understanding of this would help younger audiences 'filter' available media for authentic and credible sources of information.

Central to all these considerations is the idea of 'citizen audiences'. Participants in this study were not passive consumers of media, but in fact active critics of media. Good information, transparent analysis, interpersonal connection and open debate are all empowering and are the foundations of cultural democracy. Many younger Australians are frustrated, and subsequently cynical, because media are perceived as failing to deliver these resources.

More work needs to be done to deliver credible and relevant media for the culturally complex society Australia has become.

Effective cultural democracy requires genuine opportunities for participation. It also requires rethinking simplistic assumptions about cultural difference in Australia. Not only will this move us on from the often repeated and polarised debates about multiculturalism, it will allow for greater understanding of the everyday reality of Australia's cultural diversity. The greatest cause for optimism emerging from this study is that younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds are navigating the paradoxes we have identified with competence and pragmatism and are seeking new and better forms of connection.



# Appendix 1: Participants’ Media Use by Age Group

Based on participants’ completion of a media use survey prior to each focus group, empirical evidence for media use is provided below and divided into media classes covering print, broadcast, computer, home entertainment, mobile and attended media and events.<sup>1</sup>

## PRINT MEDIA

There were modest differences in print media use by different age groups and generations of participants (Table 1). Although overall newspaper reading increased for each successive age group, no significant differences appear to exist in readership of major daily papers. Instead, free local papers, commonly delivered in suburbs to property owners, were more likely to be read as age increases. Specialist newspaper reading was very low and flat across the age groups, but online newspaper reading showed a minimal (non-significant) increase with age.

Table 1: Print Media Use by Age Group

There was little (non-significant) variation across age groups for magazine reading and fiction book reading, but non-fiction book reading doubled from 29% to 60% across the three age groups.

Print media use occurred independently from migration generation. Indeed, there were no significant differences for key media including reading newspapers generally, reading daily newspapers, reading free local papers, online access of newspapers, reading magazines, and reading fiction or non-fiction books.

## BROADCAST MEDIA

All participants in all age groups said they watched television (Table 2). The only statistically significant differences for use of television across age groups were for the regional networks WIN and GWN. For these two, the heaviest viewers were 26-30 year-olds. Pay, digital and satellite delivery technologies were used relatively consistently across the age groups.

Medium / Service	16-20 (n=45) %	26-30 (n=43) %	36-40 (n=49) %	Overall (n=137) %	Significance X <sup>2</sup> , df=2
Newspaper	78	91	96	88	7.56, p≤0.023
Major Daily	60	69	75	68	NS
Free Local	51	74	79	68	9.3, p≤0.01
Specialised	4	5	4	4	NS
Access Online	36	44	50	44	NS
Magazines	66	71	67	68	NS
Fiction Books	33	54	55	47	NS
Non-fiction Books	29	56	60	48	10.2, p≤0.01

NS: Non-significant

<sup>1</sup> Although there is a very strong relationship between migration generation and age groups used in this study (X<sup>2</sup>=14.8, df=4, p≤0.01), the fit is not perfect and only a few generational differences were observed. Technology use was not different for generations but was for age groups. For this reason, age grouping, rather than migratory generation, is used. The non-parametric statistics used here simply indicate the significance of the pattern of responses for the participants and account for the sample size.

Table 2: Broadcast Media Use by Age Group

Medium / Service	16-20 (n=45) %	26-30 (n=43) %	36-40 (n=49) %	Overall (n=137) %	Significance $\chi^2$ , df=2
Television	100	100	100	100	NS
Channel 7	47	65	59	57	NS
Channel 9	51	63	61	58	NS
Channel 10	49	63	59	57	NS
WIN	62	70	36	53	6.9, $p \leq 0.05$
GWN	65	70	39	56	6.3, $p \leq 0.05$
ABC	73	74	80	76	NS
SBS	64	67	76	69	NS
Community TV	20	5	16	14	NS
Pay TV	29	23	22	25	NS
Analogue	82	91	86	86	NS
Digital	16	19	21	19	NS
Satellite	5	2	0	2	NS
Radio	84	83	94	87	NS
Commercial	73	65	67	68	NS
ABC	24	43	42	36	NS
SBS	2	5	17	8	7.2, $p \leq 0.03$
Community	11	13	15	13	NS

NS: Non-significant

Radio listening was at 87% overall, with little difference between groups. Only SBS Radio listening differed by age group with a linear increase from 2% to 17% with age.

Broadcast media use occurred, mainly, independently from migration generation. There were no significant differences for viewing channels 7, 9, 10, ABC or SBS. Community TV, pay TV and digital TV viewing was essentially the same for first-, second- and third-generation participants between the ages of 16 and 40. Second-generation participants were slightly more likely than first- and third-generation participants to listen to the radio. However, the type of radio listening was not different between generations.

### COMPUTER MEDIA

All participants in this study reported using at least one personal computer with nearly 80% using a desktop and 40% using a laptop. Similarly, almost all participants used the Internet. However, the way they used the Internet, differed significantly (Table 3).

Computer hardware and service use occurred independently from migration generation. Use of desktop, laptop, handheld and other computer devices appeared to be relatively constant from one generation to the next. Similarly, service use was also consistent.

Table 3: Computer Media Use by Age Group

Medium / Service	16-20 (n=45) %	26-30 (n=43) %	36-40 (n=49) %	Overall (n=137) %	Significance X <sup>2</sup> , df=2
Desktop PC	84	77	83	82	NS
Laptop PC	33	40	48	40	NS
WiFi	9	9	10	10	NS
PDA	0	5	8	4	NS
Internet	98	88	89	92	NS
Media	87	80	85	84	NS
News	24	35	35	31	NS
Search	91	67	75	84	NS
Blog	30	16	2	16	12.2, p≤0.01
Forums	23	13	11	16	NS
Games	30	8	7	15	11.1, p≤0.01
Email	93	95	100	96	NS
Messaging	67	39	19	42	21.3, p≤0.01
Content Creation	23	0	7	10	12.7, p≤0.01
Download Content	72	39	23	45	21.7, p≤0.01
Streaming Content	12	10	14	12	NS
VoIP	5	3	14	7	NS

NS: Non-significant

Table 4: Home Entertainment Technology Use by Age Group

Medium / Service	16-20 (n=45) %	26-30 (n=43) %	36-40 (n=49) %	Overall (n=137) %	Significance X <sup>2</sup> , df=2
DVD Player	98	93	83	91	6.3, p≤0.05
VCR	56	72	75	68	NS
PVR	17	12	19	15	NS
Video Games	48	14	17	29	26.2, p≤0.01

NS: Non-significant

**HOME ENTERTAINMENT TECHNOLOGY**

Nine in 10 participants used DVD technology, although use dropped slightly with age from 98% to 83% from the 16-20 year-old group to the 36-40 year-old group (Table 4). VCR use was considerably lower with 68% of all participants using one. For this technology, there was a slight (non-significant) increase with age. Personal video recorders, like digital

set-top boxes with built-in hard drives, are not yet common. Computer and video games, however, were used by nearly one in three of the participants in this study, with a significant difference between the youngest group (nearly half play) and the older two groups (fewer than one in six play).

All three generational groups in the sample appeared to use home entertainment technologies to similar degrees with one notable exception: video games. For this technology the difference was stark with 19% of first-generation, 30% of second-generation and 63% of third-generation participants saying they used the technology. This parallels the sample of 36-40 year-olds across the generations with 60% first-generation, 33% second-generation and 8% third-generation participants.

### MOBILE MEDIA

Although almost all (96%) participants reported using a mobile phone, applications beyond voice calls differed significantly by age group (Table 5). For example, although SMS use was high, it dropped for each successive age group. WAP and email use was strongest among the youngest age group, although the oldest age group showed stronger use of these than the middle group. Mobile games showed steady decline from about one-third of participants in the youngest group to less than a tenth in the oldest.

Table 5: Mobile Media Use by Age Group

Medium / Service	16-20 (n=45) %	26-30 (n=43) %	36-40 (n=49) %	Overall (n=137) %	Significance X <sup>2</sup> , df=2
Mobile Phone	98	95	96	96	NS
	(n=44)	(n=41)	(n=47)	(n=132)	
SMS	98	91	83	90	5.8, p≤0.06
WAP/Net	31	9	13	18	8.4, p≤0.02
Email	27	2	19	16	10.0, p≤0.01
Games	31	16	9	19	8.0, p≤0.02

NS: Non-significant

Mobile media use changed little from one migration generation to the next. All three generations were mobile telephone users. The only significant difference was for games, with second-generation participants using this technology more than first- and third-generations. This is not particularly surprising because 67% of 16-20 year-olds in this study were second-generation Australians. In other words, age more than generation in Australia is the predictor for these findings.

### ATTENDED MEDIA AND EVENTS

Younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds seem to be a strong audience for events, particularly those involving entertainment. Cinema attendance, for example, was high with 90% saying they go to the movies (Table 6). Nearly six in 10 say they attend theatre and live music. Fewer than half attend live sport or festivals and about one quarter attend social clubs.

The only differences across the age groups were in museum or gallery visits and game arcade attendance with an increase in gallery visits and a steady decline in arcade attendance with increasing age.

No significant differences were observed by generation for any of these attended events.

Table 6: Attended Media and Events by Age Group

Medium / Service	16-20 (n=45) %	26-30 (n=43) %	36-40 (n=49) %	Overall (n=137) %	Significance $\chi^2$ , df=2
Cinema	89	93	87	90	NS
Theatre	33	47	53	56	NS
Museum/Gallery	16	33	53	34	14.6, $p \leq 0.01$
Arcade Games	38	12	11	20	13.3, $p \leq 0.01$
Live Music/Club	37	57	51	58	NS
Live Sport	42	44	43	43	NS
Festival	40	61	43	47	NS
Social Club	22	23	26	34	NS

NS: Non-significant

## Appendix 2: Methodology

### OBJECTIVES

*Connecting Diversity: Paradoxes of Multicultural Australia* set out to further explore some of the key findings of *Living Diversity: Australia's Multicultural Future*. These included the incomplete sense of belonging experienced by Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds and the notion of the 'unfinished business' of multiculturalism in Australia. In its brief to the authors, SBS indicated it was particularly interested in younger people and in generational change as it relates to media use and engagement with Australian public life.

The research considered the attitudes and experiences of younger people, defined as between the ages of 16 and 40, who were separated into age bands in order to track differences between these groups. By surveying a relatively large age range, SBS was interested in gaining the perspectives of the current second- and third-generations of residents in Australia, as well as more recently arrived Australians of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

This qualitative research sought to explore the role media play in the lives of young people from culturally diverse backgrounds, in particular whether it offered possibilities for enablement in a cultural and political sense. The research was based on focus groups which were conducted with the aim of extracting the personal experiences of the participants. Questions covered six main areas: media use; media and information; aspirations and enablement; engagement with public life; identity and belonging; and Australian content, including a brief section on perceptions of SBS.

### RESEARCH TEAM

The project Research Team comprised:

- Professor Ien Ang and Dr Greg Noble from the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney
- Dr Jeff Brand from the Centre for New Media Research and Education, Bond University
- Dr Jason Sternberg from the Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology

### SBS COMMISSIONING TEAM

The project was commissioned by SBS in line with its 2004-06 Corporate Plan (Objective 1.9 "*Increase our understanding of Australia's cultural diversity, our audiences and the role of SBS...*").

The brief and planning for this project was managed by an SBS internal team including:

- Julie Eisenberg, Head of Policy (commissioning)
- Georgie McClean, Policy Adviser (project management and co-ordination)
- Therese Iverach, Policy Researcher (research assistance)
- Christine Ratnasingham, Policy Researcher (research assistance)

The brief was developed in consultation with the SBS Executive Committee and an internal Working Group from SBS programming areas.



## Study Model

### DATA SOURCES

The study model included:

- a screener questionnaire;
- a media use survey conducted prior to each focus group;
- focus group discussion based on a schedule of about 30 questions (see below for more detail about the questions); and
- a 'jotter' form in which participants described their cultural background and could write additional comments.

### FOCUS GROUPS

The Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA) conducted the focus groups. CIRCA recruited the focus group participants according to a recruitment profile developed by the research team, and moderated the groups using a schedule of questions and guidelines provided by the same team. In the final stage, CIRCA developed a preliminary analysis report on the focus group findings.

For details of the focus groups – location and numbers– see page 10 of this report.

### LOCATIONS

Participants for the focus groups were recruited on the basis of age and geographic location, rather than 'cultural community', as a source of common experience in the findings.

The focus groups were conducted in the following locations:

### SELECTION OF LOCATIONS

These locations were chosen to provide a wide 'reach' to the study. Sydney and Brisbane were chosen as they are distinctively different cities in terms of demographic profile and identity; Sydney is a more commonly understood 'multicultural' city, whereas Brisbane has fewer long-established cultural groups. This was seen as providing a useful comparison of urban experiences of diversity. Regional locations in Western Australia were chosen to ensure the study was not east coast specific or major-cities oriented. This made the project more national in scope.

The choice of specific locations within these areas was based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data from the 2001 Census including 'Ancestry', 'Languages Spoken at Home' and 'Individual Income' ('Basic Community Profile and Snapshot'). It was determined by the research team that each location should comprise significant cultural diversity and not contain areas of extreme advantage or disadvantage based on the ABS 'Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas' (SEIFA) scale (2001 Census). Areas of obvious 'media panic' such as Macquarie Fields in Sydney (where riots took place in 2005), were avoided as they had the potential to skew responses. Other data sources included information on local government areas (NSW Department of Local Government; Queensland Department of Local Government; Western Australia Department of Local Government and Regional Development).

#### Sydney

Liverpool  
Chatswood / Willoughby  
Strathfield / Burwood / Ashfield

#### Brisbane

Inala / Richlands  
Stretton-Karawatha  
Mount Ommaney

#### Western Australia

Bunbury  
Carnarvon  
Broome

## TIMING

The limitations in timing the research, which were factored into analysis by the research team, included:

- The recency of the London bombings (July 2005) and debates around terrorism, including the Federal Government's Anti-Terrorism Bill;
- The conduct of the focus groups during Ramadan;
- The exam period of the Higher School Certificate in Sydney which affected recruitment of participants in the 16-20 age band;
- Harvesting activities in some of the agriculture-based Western Australia locations; and
- Timetable clashes with cultural activities in some smaller towns.

## RECRUITMENT

A number of different methods were used to recruit respondents for this study because locations, where focus groups were conducted, differed markedly in size. These different methods included:

- Sydney: Market research recruitment agencies; CIRCA's cultural groups contacts.
- Brisbane: Fieldwork agencies 'cold calling' all residential phone numbers with surnames indicating a culturally diverse background in the geographical areas of interest.
- Western Australia: As there were no formalised recruitment networks in the selected locations, local contacts (often individuals who ran community groups in the area) were used; 'cold calling' from the 251 residential phone numbers, yielded by a search of surnames, which indicated a culturally diverse background; and 'door-knocking' local businesses in the area.

A 'snowballing' technique was also applied across all recruitment methods. That is, all individuals approached during recruitment were asked whether they knew anyone else who may qualify for the study.

CIRCA aimed to recruit a range of participants where possible. For some focus groups (particularly in Sydney) this meant that limitations were placed on the number of recruits who were 'Anglo migrants' (that is, either they, their parents or their grandparents were born in a country where English was the main language spoken). There was also a concerted effort to ensure the sample represented a mix of generations in Australia (that is, first-, second- and third-generations).

It is important to note also, that while the study deliberately comprised participants from culturally diverse backgrounds, they were not chosen as 'representative' of a particular cultural group or community. An understanding of the heterogeneity and hybridity of cultural identities provided a basis for the analysis of responses and comments from the groups.

Before the commencement of each focus group, participants signed release forms for the use of their details (first name, age, location and cultural background). Participants were asked to describe their own cultural background which was used to inform the set of self-definitions used in this report.

## QUESTION AREAS

Six topics were selected for the schedule of questions used in the focus groups.

**1. Media use** – To start each session the moderator questioned participants on which media they ‘could not live without’ and then led the group into discussion on what they felt these media ‘did for them’ and how they believed their media use differed from that of their parents’ generation. This section was intended as introductory and to encourage participants to think broadly when referring to ‘the media’. A media use survey, conducted prior to each focus group, gathered quantitative information (see Appendix 1). The survey listed many kinds of media including local, global, electronic and communications in order to broaden the discussion beyond the obvious broadcast and print forms.

**2. Media and information** – The next set of questions, intended to elicit ideas about sources of information, started by inviting participants to list topics which had captured their attention from ‘media coverage’ in the previous week. Participants were asked to nominate where they sought information that was important to them, and what they considered to be ‘good’ and ‘bad’ information. Prompts for these questions sought to explore the values against which participants judged sources of information. Participants were asked whether news and current affairs coverage made respondents ‘angry’, and to describe or qualify responses to content. (The question was deliberately phrased in emotive terms to require consideration of a scale of responses, in an attempt to counter the standardisation of group comments.)

**3. Aspirations and enablement** – In this section, the moderator presented cards which read ‘Australia’, ‘Multiculturalism’ and ‘The Future’. Participants were asked to respond to these words by describing what they thought was good or bad about them. The groups were allowed to set their own terms for discussion. Negative as well as positive responses were prompted. This was followed by more general questions about perceived generational change in aspirations or hopes for the future. Participants were asked to consider differences between their own aspirations and those of previous generations.

**4. Engagement with public life** – This section turned the discussion to a listing of ‘important’ issues facing the world and Australia. The moderator asked respondents to state what they felt they personally could do about the issues they had already described as important. They were then asked to nominate what would motivate them to contribute or become involved in any kind of action in relation to the issues.

**5. Identity and belonging** – Participants were asked to identify whether they felt part of a community and then to describe this community. They were asked to state whether they felt Australia was ‘home’ and then if they ‘felt at home’ in Australia and to explain their responses. Respondents were asked whether they would describe themselves as Australian, if others would describe them as Australian, and if they could think of situations in which they didn’t feel Australian.

**6. Australian content** – Participants were asked to identify their favourite television programs and then their favourite Australian television programs and to describe, in general terms, how they compared. Attitudes to Australian films were also discussed as was the appeal (or otherwise) of Australian websites. Respondents were asked whether the Australia that they ‘saw, heard or read about in the media’ represented the Australia they knew and experienced. The session concluded with some brief questions on representations of cultural diversity in media and about SBS.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analysed in two stages:

- The first stage examined the demography and other sample characteristics based on recruitment outcomes, and descriptions of media use based on the media use survey (see Appendix 1).
- The second stage was more detailed, involving a theme analysis of the focus group transcripts.

Demographic and media use survey data were coded and entered by CIRCA. They were analysed using SPSS for Windows (Version 13) by the Research Team. Simple descriptive, frequency and cross-tabulation statistics were compiled.

The focus groups were led by a single moderator and observed by members of the research and coordination team. Focus group transcripts were interrogated using theme analysis by the Research Team. Each researcher concentrated on particular sections of the focus group question schedule and canvassed the entire body of verbatim responses within the relevant sections.

Broad themes emerged from the data which formed the foundation for the findings described in this report. The authors each worked on a section of the report with a strong collaboration between findings and a view to the overall themes emerging from the study.

#### Multicultural Australia Today

Professor Ien Ang

#### Ways of Belonging to Australia

Dr Greg Noble

#### Younger People as Citizen Audiences

Dr Jeff Brand

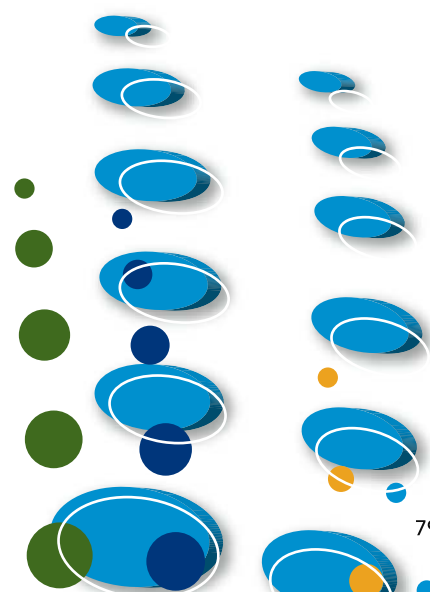
#### News and Current Affairs: Cynicism and Values

Dr Jason Sternberg

#### Appendix 1

Dr Jeff Brand

The project management team at SBS assisted in information management, compilation of the findings, editing and considerations in preparing the report for publication.





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## CONNECTING DIVERSITY: PARADOXES OF MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

*Are young Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds hopeful or fearful about the future? Are they 'turning off' from world issues? Has traditional media let them down? Do second- and third-generation Australians feel part of the 'lucky country'?*

The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) sought answers to these questions and commissioned a study that reveals a series of paradoxes in young people's perceptions and experiences of multicultural Australia.

*Connecting Diversity: Paradoxes of Multicultural Australia* is a snapshot of personal experiences, community ties and media engagement through the eyes of 16- to 40-year-olds in locations across Australia.

This report, a follow-up study to SBS's 2002 *Living Diversity: Australia's Multicultural Future*, finds that younger Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds interact more with cultural difference than previous generations. They still experience exclusion, racism and a disconnection with mainstream media, which can lead to an incomplete sense of belonging, but use 'practical tolerance' to negotiate diversity in their daily lives. They live pragmatically with the paradoxes of multicultural Australia.